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# Chinese gastronomic nomenclature: Culture and translation

**Abstract:** Gastronomy is a cornerstone of all civilizations and the essence of every culture worldwide. Chinese cuisine has been enjoying growing popularity internationally over the years. The richness of Chinese food not only resides in its delicate and abundant tastes, but also in its millenary history, which contributes to the numerous regional cuisines and a deeply rooted gastronomic culture. It also relates to different areas of society such as philosophy, traditional medicine, etc. The nomenclature of Chinese dishes, which reflects the essence of its culture, is considered a linguistic art and incorporates several cultural elements, including ingredients, colors, flavors, culinary techniques, utensils, anthroponyms, toponyms, metaphors, historical legends and so on and so forth. Furthermore, it follows certain patterns, which could be roughly divided into descriptive, figurative and mixed.

Despite the importance of translation in the gastronomic field, the relationship between gastronomy, culture and translation has not yet been fully researched in academia. This chapter gives a detailed description of the language of Chinese food to illustrate the cultural components of Chinese gastronomic nomenclature, as well as insights into and discussion on the difficulties encountered in their translation.

**Keywords:** Food translation, Chinese gastronomic culture, Chinese gastronomic translation, Chinese dishes

## 1 Chinese gastronomic culture

In today's globalized landscape, the frequent and extensive cultural exchanges are influencing many aspects of our daily life. Peterson (2005, 1992) proposes the term "cultural omnivorousness" to describe this new and general tendency of consuming the gastronomic, musical and artistic products from a variety of cultures. Undoubtedly, gastronomy consists of a very relevant part of this phenomenon. In this context, the translation of gastronomic nomenclature is an ongoing practice with

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importance for academic research. In this chapter, we are focusing specifically on the culture and the translation of Chinese gastronomic nomenclature.

The history of Chinese gastronomy spans thousands of years and it offers a great variety of dishes. On the one hand, up to the Yuan, Ming and Qing dynasties, Chinese gastronomy had already been highly developed, while on the other hand, China embraces an extensive territory in which geographical and climatic conditions vary greatly from region to region. So, there is a wide variety of natural resources and dietary habits throughout the country, which has led to a very diverse range of Chinese cuisines. This all means that classifying Chinese cuisine style is a rather complex issue; one approach could be according to regions, consumers and ethnicities (Du & Yao, 2013, p. 87).

## 1.1 The grammar of Chinese cuisine

In his book *The language of food: A linguist reads the menu*, Jurafsky (2014) proposes a theory called “the grammar of cuisine”, in which he compares cuisines to languages:

Just as a language has an implicit grammar that native speakers know even if they can't explain, a cuisine has an implicit structure, a set of rules about which foods go together, what constitutes a “grammatical” dish or meal in that cuisine. The implicit structure of cuisine consists of rules about how dishes are structured out of ingredients, meals are structured out of dishes, and entire cuisines out of particular flavor combinations and required cooking techniques (Jurafsky, 2014, p.178).

Jurafsky (2014) indicates four aspects of the grammar of cuisine: the ordering of meals, the structure of a meal, the implicit rules about the flavors that make up individual dishes and cooking techniques. Given its relevance for translators, the following summarizes the grammar of cuisine.

### 1.1.1 The order of meals

Each country has its own specific terms and ways of organizing their own courses of meals. Unlike the case in Europe which consists of a main course and dessert, generally speaking, the Chinese ordering of meals is completely different: for daily meals at home, all dishes are usually placed on the table at the same time. As for soup or porridge, the order in which they are eaten may vary according to different regions and customs. As for dining in Chinese formal restaurants, the order of the courses differs again. Normally, it starts with small cold dishes such

as appetizers, followed by the hot dishes. As for desserts, there is no Chinese word meaning “dessert”, since there is no tradition of having dessert at the end of each meal. This could explain the tradition of serving fortune cookies in Chinese restaurants in the US, which is a way of filling the “dessert gap” for American consumers (Jurafsky, 2014, p. 185).

### 1.1.2 The structure of a meal

Since antiquity, China has been a civilization based primarily on agriculture, and eating a wide variety of cereals has been the essential energy source of a Chinese diet (Du & Yao, 2013). In Chinese gastronomy, there is a concept called “staple food” (主食), which mainly consists of starchy foods which are an immediate source of energy. The most common are rice and flour based food (面食, *mianshi*), with diverse types of noodles, *mantou* (馒头, ‘steamed bread’), among many others (Du & Yao, 2013).

Jurafsky (2014) points out that Chinese food often has “constraints on the ingredients and their combination: Meal = starch + nonstarch” (Jurafsky, 2014, p. 180). This equation means that a Chinese meal is composed of two parts: the staple food and the complementary food like vegetables, meat, seafood, eggs, etc. This structure can be presented in a single dish, such as a plate of noodles or rice with chicken, or different dishes in a meal as a whole.

### 1.1.3 The implicit rules about the flavors that make up individual dishes

This aspect of the grammar of Chinese cuisine is related to flavours. Jurafsky (2014) compares dishes to words, explaining that particular ingredients or flavour elements are as the sounds (the ‘phones’) that make up a word or dish. Just as speakers of different languages can all recognize different phonemes but pronounce them with nuances, the ability to perceive flavours (sour, sweet, bitter, salty, spicy and umami) is also universal, and “each cuisine may express these universal flavor elements using ingredients that add their own culturally specific flavors” (Jurafsky, 2014, p. 181).

According to the “flavour principle” proposed by Rozin (1973), different combinations of specific flavors define a cuisine. The following section details the flavors of Chinese cuisine as a gustatory art.

### 1.1.4 Cooking techniques

In terms of Chinese cooking techniques, a special and diverse system has been developed over thousands of years. Historically, the basis of cooking techniques essentially took shape up to the Yuan, Ming and Qing Dynasties (Du & Yao, 2013), and as history progressed, these have been further developed and enriched till they have become the core aspect of the grammar of Chinese cuisine. The total number of these techniques is unclear. According to Zhao and Liang (2017), there are around 30 or 40 basic techniques, which could be divided into two categories: culinary techniques for hot dishes and those for cold dishes (Zhao & Liang, 2017).

## 1.2 Chinese gastronomic aesthetics

Gastronomy is a form of art that encompasses several aesthetic aspects. It is not only an art of taste, but also the dimensions of visual presentation and the aromas we can detect. This section analyses the four aesthetic facets of Chinese gastronomy: gastronomy as a visual, gustatory, olfactory and linguistic art.

### 1.2.1 Visual

Gastronomy is a visual art. Cooks “paint” the dishes with ingredients of diverse colors, decorate them using various shapes, and frame them within a range of culinary ware (although it is not necessarily mandatory for every dish). On occasions this is also reflected in the name of the dishes and could be taken into account in the translation.

Colors are an important element of a dish, which may influence people’s appetite and could also indicate the quality of the food. In a Chinese dish, a combination of bright and vivid colors is usually preferred. Red, yellow, green and white, for example, are the frequently used elements of the palette of Chinese dishes (Zhao & Liang, 2017, p. 144). Many Chinese dishes are named using its color. Take a scallop dish *wucai xuehua shanbei* (五彩雪花扇贝) for example, whose name represents the combination of colors. *Wucai* (五彩) literally means “five colors”, which refers to the color of the condiments (chopped garlic, chives, chopped fresh hot chilies, etc.). In contrast, *xuehua* (雪花), which means “snow”, alludes to the color of the scallop.

Another basic element of this visual art lies in its shape, in particular, the ingredients (and condiments) and the overall presentation of the dish. Regarding cutting methods, in China almost all the ingredients and condiments are cut into

different shapes and sizes accordingly before cooking. This is why the Chinese do not use knives and forks as utensils, simply chopsticks and spoons. In this sense, the preparation of ingredients is different between Chinese and the Western gastronomy in general. The former pays much more attention to shaping the ingredients before cooking than the latter. In fact, this skill of cutting called *daogong* (刀工, ‘the skill of cutting’) is one of the basic skills learned by Chinese cooks during their training. In fact, master chefs even pursue the *daogong* as an artistic technique (Du & Yao, 2013).

There are approximately 200 types of cutting method in Chinese gastronomy (Du & Yao, 2013, p. 111). Besides the common shapes like slices, strips, cubes, etc., there are more professional nuanced cuts. These cutting methods or shapes of the ingredients are also often found in the dish names. For example, the last character of the dish *pa niurou tiao* (扒牛肉条, ‘cooked veal strips’) *tiao* (条, ‘strips’) alludes to the shape of the veal. In another dish *roumo qiezi* (肉沫茄子, ‘eggplants with minced pork’), the character *mo* (沫, ‘the minced form’) indicates that the meat is minced.

As for the presentation of the dish, this is an essential factor in Chinese gastronomy. In international cooking competitions, for example, Chinese chefs can even create sculptures using the ingredients. Many dish names also reflect the overall presentation, for example, *songshuyu* (松鼠鱼), literally means “squirrel-shaped fish”. By way of another example, *tai ji* tofu (太极豆腐, ‘tofu in the form of tai chi’), as the name suggests, is a dish shaped after the tai chi symbol.

The last visual element of Chinese gastronomic art is the culinary containers of the dishes when being served. Although special containers are not used in all cases, they form an important criterion regarding the visual presentation. According to Du and Yao (2013), the dish container could contribute to enhancing the food, since they are chosen according to the presentation and colors of the dish, the characteristics of the ingredients, the theme of the banquet and so on. For example, there are fish-shaped plates especially designed to serve fish dish (Du & Yao, 2013, p. 117–119). Generally, the dish containers are prepared separately, and in some cases, the kitchen utensil in which the food is cooked could be used directly when serving. For example, the famous *hot pot* (火锅 *huoguo*) is named after the cooking utensil.

### 1.2.2 Gustatory

Undoubtedly, Chinese gastronomy is considered a gustatory art, the very essence of gastronomy. Two corresponding perspectives are described here below: the flavors and the texture.

Flavors can be simple or complex. In previous content, the flavor principle was introduced, which states that specific flavor combinations can define the typology of a cuisine. Here, we will introduce how the Chinese cuisine expresses its specific flavor patterns applying the universal flavor components. According to Zhao and Liang (2017), the flavors of Chinese cuisine can be categorized into two groups: simple and complex flavors. Simple flavors constitute the basic elements; Zhao and Liang (2017) propose seven types of simple flavors in Chinese cuisine: salty, sweet, sour, spicy, bitter, umami, and *xiang* (香) (Zhao & Liang, 2017, p. 64).

The etymology of *umami* (鲜, *xian*) originates from Japanese, which is produced by amino acids from raw materials. Here are some examples of common condiments which produce this flavor: monosodium glutamate (MSG) (味精, *weijing*), chicken essence (鸡精, *jijing*), oyster sauce, etc. *Xiang* (香) refers to a general expression that describes the delicious taste or smell of food and is a very common word in Chinese. In addition, another simple flavor worth mentioning is called *ma* (麻, ‘numbing flavor’), which is characteristic of Sichuan cuisine. This flavor in particular consists of the numbing sensation of the tongue produced by a spice called *huajiao* (花椒, ‘Sichuan pepper’), and is usually accompanied by a spicy flavor. Broadly speaking, there is a saying that describes the typical flavors of different regions in China: “Spicy in the east, sour in the west, sweet in the south, salty in the north” (东辣西酸, 南甜北咸 *dongla xisuan, nantian beixian*, translated by the authors) (Zhao & Liang, 2017, p. 84).

Regarding complexity, it is worth mentioning that the majority of Chinese cuisine has complex flavors. In fact, the very ability to create original and delicious complex flavors is one of the main goals of the chefs. Like a symphony, the synthesis of flavors reaches gustatory harmony through its diversity. As a Chinese expression goes, “five flavors in harmony” (五味调和 *wuwei tiaohhe*), which voices the philosophy of harmony via sense of taste. Despite the multitude of complex flavors, there are various fixed and common combinations. Here we present two examples.

*Yuxiang* (鱼香, ‘fish flavour’) is a traditional complex flavor which originates from Sichuan culinary style. Despite its literal meaning, this flavor in fact has nothing to do with fish. It is elaborated using a mixture of seasonings. For example, scallion, ginger, garlic, red chili, sugar, soy sauce and vinegar. It was given this name because this mixture of seasonings is very common in fish-cooking in Sichuan province (Zhao & Liang, 2017, p. 66). Another example is *Mala* (麻辣, ‘numbing and spicy’), another rather common complex flavor which also comes from Sichuan cuisine. As explained above, the flavor *ma* (麻, ‘numbing flavor’) and *la* (辣, ‘spicy’) usually go together. This combination is one of the most pungent and popular complex flavors in China.

As regards texture, this is another aspect of food which could also stimulate gustatory pleasure (Zhao & Liang, 2017, p. 145). For example, the crunchy texture (脆 *cui*) may be a sign of freshness of the ingredients, apart from its pleasant gustatory effect. To name a few more examples: juicy, smooth or tender.

### 1.2.3 Olfactory

Chinese gastronomy is also an art of olfaction. The attractive and delicious smell of food brings us great olfactory joy. Since ancient China, it has become one of the most important culinary criteria (Zhao & Liang, 2017, p. 144). As shown above, the omnipresent Chinese word that describes the attractive smell of food is *xiang* (香, ‘the aromatic smell of food’), which is produced by using a wide range of condiments. In the English vocabulary, there are terms such as “delicious” to express a good taste and “beautiful” for good looks but there is smaller vocabulary with respect to good smell.

Unpleasant smells can also be found in Chinese cuisine; a classic example is the famous dish *chou doufu* (臭豆腐, ‘stinky tofu’). There are several variations of this dish found in different regions. Foreigners might consider it an exotic and unpleasant dish, however, this smell in fact comes from the sulphide substance that is produced from the decomposition of protein but is really quite tasty and nutritious dish.

### 1.2.4 Linguistic

Chinese gastronomy not only focuses on the senses, but also on language. Chinese gastronomic nomenclature is considered a linguistic art, given its diversity, delicacy and beauty. In the words of Bassnett (1988, p. 22), “Language, then, is the heart within the body of culture, and it is the interaction between the two that results in the continuation of life-energy.” The next section discusses the language of Chinese food in more detail.

## 2 Language of Chinese food

The Chinese gastronomic nomenclature pursues pleasant, attractive, auspicious and even poetic effects according to different occasions. (Zhao & Liang, 2017, p. 150). Up to this point, we have analyzed the grammar and the aesthetics of Chi-

nese gastronomy. This section further develops the afore mentioned cultural elements such as culinary techniques, color, shape, taste, culinary containers, flavors, texture and smell, and also the naming methods and classification of the nomenclature.

## 2.1 Cultural components

Culinary techniques are one of the most essential components of gastronomic nomenclature. They provide plenty of additional information on the dish, such as the preparation method or the culinary style. Colors are a frequent element in the dish names, describing the color of ingredients and condiments. For example, the first two characters of the dish *huangjin kao shanbei* (黄金烤扇贝, ‘roasted golden scallops’), *huangjin* (黄金, ‘gold or golden color’), indicates the color of the dish, alluding to the sautéed chopped garlic. Shape is also often found in the dish names. As we mentioned above, it could refer to the cutting style or the overall presentation of the dish.

Generally speaking, when special culinary containers are used, they are reflected in the names. For example, *guan men yangrou* (罐焖羊肉, ‘braised lamb in clay pot’). The character *guan* (罐) is a general term for a culinary pot made of clay, which is often found in Chinese culinary nomenclature, referring to different types of culinary pots used in various styles of cuisines.

The Chinese word for flavor is *wei* (味). When we see it, we know that this word is emphasizing the flavors. However, the appearance of *wei* (味) is not indispensable to indicate the flavors, since it can be expressed with a multitude of other words. Clear examples of this are *yuxiang* (鱼香, ‘fish flavor’) and *mala* (麻辣, ‘numbing and spicy’) mentioned above. Finally, *xiang* (香, ‘the pleasant smell of food’) can be frequently observed in the dish names. Although it does not always provide concrete information about the dish, it does underline the deliciousness of the food.

Apart from these elements, toponyms and anthroponyms are also a part of the cultural components of gastronomic nomenclature. Toponyms can indicate the origin or the most representative locations of the cuisine, such as Beijing *kaoya* (北京烤鸭, ‘Beijing roast duck’). Anthroponyms generally refer to the names of the creator or historical character (famous or common) related to the dish. The typical dish *Gongbao jiding* (宫保鸡丁, ‘Kung Pao chicken’) contains the name of its inventor. Sometimes, the nomenclature itself consists of a legend or historical tale, which is very unique to Chinese gastronomic culture. For instance, *Fotiaoqiang* (佛跳墙, ‘Buddha jumping over the wall’) is a well-known traditional delicacy from the Fujian province, which consists of a mixture of seafood, meat, certain vegetables and



mushrooms in simmered soup. This name is rooted in various tales and legends, and one simple version tells that the dish smells so delicious that even a vegetarian monk wants to taste it by jumping over the temple wall.

## 2.2 Naming methods

To date there are different proposals in the literature concerning naming methods in and classification of Chinese gastronomic nomenclature, however, in this section we have adopted the proposal by Zhao and Liang (2017). Broadly speaking, the naming methods can be grouped into: the descriptive/ literal (写实, *xieshi*), the figurative (虚拟, *xuni*) and a combination of both (hybrid).

The descriptive/literal method, which is more similar to the Western culinary naming, refers to using the factual information of the dishes, such as ingredients, culinary techniques, colors, shapes, culinary containers and flavors. In contrast, the figurative method does not use factual information, but rather rhetorical elements such as metaphors, tales, legends, *chengyu* (成语, ‘idiom’), etc. Lastly, the hybrid method is a combination of the factual and figurative (Zhao & Liang, 2017, p. 151). An example of the latter is *babao ya* (八宝鸭), which literally means “duck stuffed with eight treasures”: *ya* (鸭) means duck, which is the factual element of the dish; while *babao* (八宝) is a rhetorical expression which refers to the stuffing of the duck made up of various ingredients such as peas, glutinous rice, shrimps, along with some diced vegetables.

## 3 Translating Chinese gastronomic nomenclature

Gastronomic translation can have a wide range of potential audiences: from cooks interested in foreign cuisines, foodies who follow TV cooking programmes or people that want to adapt Chinese recipes found in the Internet, to foreign restaurant or supermarket customers. Gastronomic translation is applicable to a wider range of spheres than likely was believed before.

There has been relevant research into Chinese gastronomy. Yi (2009) discusses the Chinese menu translation from a gastronomic cultural difference perspective. Wang (2008) researches on this topic taking into account linguistic and cultural untranslatability. Xiong (2013) studies the translation of Chinese dish names from a cross-cultural communication perspective with an interesting focus on a special branch of Chinese gastronomy: medicinal cuisine. Cai (2017) researches the translation of Chinese dish names applying functionalist approaches.

Saihong Li (2019, p. 12–15) presents an interesting proposal for gastronomic translation. It consists of a multimodal method for translating menus from Chinese into English. Li considers that the combination of intralinguistic (use of pinyin), interlinguistic and inter semiotic (pictures of the dish) translation is highly effective for menu translation. This visual aid, according to Li (2019), “moves menus beyond a merely informative function towards a more demonstrative advertising function” (p. 13).

The terminology study plays a fundamental role in gastronomic translation. One of the major challenges is the lack of equivalences between different culinary cultures regarding ingredients, condiments, culinary techniques, etc. Paradowski (2018) points out that the culinary translators need the competence of “encyclopedic knowledge”. Moreover, the information on the practical usage of the terms in gastronomic domain appears scarce (Paradowski, 2018, p. 55). For instance, in a Chinese medicinal cuisine translation research, the terminology of Chinese traditional medicine is unavoidable.

Another factor we need to bear in mind is the function of a translation of Chinese gastronomic nomenclature. Text typology needs to be clarified in the first place: fiction, cookbooks, documentaries, menus, etc. Ruzaitė (2006, p. 257) empathizes the importance of menu translation, as the quality of translated menus could improve the service quality and avoid intercultural mis-communication. In addition, the author states: “By being both informative and expressive, menus can be said to perform both ideational and interpersonal functions” (Ruzaitė, 2006, p. 259). Xiong (2013) also highlights that the translators should take economical efficiency and transmissibility into serious consideration.

The consequences of bad translation are not trivial, as stated by Fuentes-Luque (2017):

[ . . . ] the consequences can range from a laughter to undesirable nasty misunderstandings, religious, and even health issues (such as allergies), which can (and actually do) have a damaging effect, not only for the restaurant, but also for the tourist destination and even the local economy (Fuentes-Luque, 2017, p. 178).

Fuentes-Luque (2017, p. 180) enumerates the advantages of high-quality menu translations: (i) to reflect the quality of served food; (ii) give a positive image of the location (city, region or country) and the restaurant; (iii) attract and retain local customers, (iv) expand business and broaden the scope of the market share. According to the author: “Cheap translations are ultimately more expensive as a so-called money-saving translation can result in expensive revisions.” In conclusion, menu translation quality contributes to culinary experience in a significant way (Fuentes-Luque, 2017, p. 187).

### 3.1 Difficulties and challenges

There are ingredients that are difficult to find in another country, which has often been considered a fundamental difficulty in gastronomic translation. However, this is a very limited view of the difficulties of gastronomic translation. Having discussed the wide variety of factors and elements involved in the nomenclature of Chinese dishes, we now turn to the challenges of translation from the perspective of different criteria, with the following suggestions:

- a) Linguistic accuracy. This criterion may seem obvious, but there are many inaccuracies and translation errors in real restaurant menus.
- b) Culinary/cultural accuracy. The translation should help the customer to decide whether to order the dish or not. If possible, it would be better to enumerate the main ingredients and the cooking method. Thus, the translation may entail including new items (e.g., cooking method) that were not in the original name of the dish. Chinese customers are generally familiar with the cooking method behind the Chinese names, but customers from other countries may not. Moreover, mentioning the cooking method helps to raise awareness of China's gastronomic culture.
- c) Palatability (Appetizing dishes). In addition to being informative, menus also have an appealing function, which is to attract customers. Therefore, in the translation of menus, this appetizing feature must also be maintained. Translations that may cause customers to lose their appetite are not considered adequate, even though they might be faithful and accurate.
- d) Exoticism. The use of pinyin in the translation of Chinese cuisine could bring an exotic touch to foreign customers. It may not be necessary for all the dishes but it may be a good translation strategy for famous dishes which contributes to spreading the word about these dishes.

#### 3.1.1 Descriptive names

In this section we provide ten specific examples with the translation of descriptive names which respect the translation criteria given above. Translations should strive to describe the dish as accurately as possible respecting the richness of Chinese senses (visual aspect, smell, taste, etc.) while sounding natural in English. The challenge for the translator is to find a balance.

1. *Guangdong baiqie ji* (广东白切鸡) is a famous dish from Guangdong province (广东). *Bai* (白) means “white”, which refers to the color of the dish. *Qie* (切) literally means “cut”. *Ji* (鸡) is the ingredient “chicken”. As the original name explains, this is a cold dish with chicken cut into pieces. The whole chicken is

boiled in water until cooked, then cooled, cut and served in a dish and the last step consists of preparing a sauce and pouring it over the chicken. A translation which respects aforementioned translation criteria is “Cantonese Boiled Chicken Slices (Served with Soy Sauce, Ginger Sauce or Ginger and Scallion Sauce)”. This example is given in the book *Enjoy Culinary Delights: The English Translation of Chinese Menus* (Zhao, 2011, p. 18), and focuses more on culinary than linguistic accuracy, adding lots of details, such as shape and condiments.

2. *Sanxian chao fan* (三鲜炒饭) is one of the most common Chinese dishes found overseas. *Sanxian* (三鲜) is an idiom which refers to three fresh ingredients which vary according to the region and customs. *San* (三) means “three” and *xian* (鲜) means “fresh”. Ingredients may be vegetables, meat, seafood, fish, etc. In general, one kind of seafood is included among these three ingredients, as Chinese *haixian* (海鲜) refers to “seafood and fish”. The ingredient *fan* (饭) refers to “rice” for which there is a popular coined translation: “Fried Rice with Three Delicacies”. Even in Spanish, the translation is “arroz tres delicias”, probably a literal translation from English.
3. *Muxu Rou* (木须肉) is more commonly eaten in northern China. This traditional dish is cooked with sliced pork, eggs and a kind of edible black mushrooms, *mu'er* (木耳), with vegetables. *Rou* (肉) means “meat” and refers to any edible meat. In Chinese dishes, unless otherwise specified, this character means it is made of pork. A translation which illustrates the translation criteria proposed here is “*Muxu* Pork (Sautéed Sliced Pork, Eggs and Black Fungus)” (Zhao, 2011, p. 30). The use of pinyin “*muxu*” adds an exotic touch to the translation and culinary accuracy is maintained.
4. *Wucai lapi* (五彩拉皮) is a popular cold dish from northern China. *Wucai* (五彩) means literally “five colors”, or “multicolor” in a broader sense. This multicolored look is obtained with several secondary ingredients such as carrots, cucumber or mushrooms. *Lapi* (拉皮) are thick transparent noodles made from potatoes, sweet potatoes or legumes. A translation proposal which respects the criteria set out here is “Multicoloured Tossed Clear Noodles” (Zhao, 2011, p. 18). The reference to colour may well contribute to whetting one’s appetite. In cases where there is no direct equivalence, adding more descriptive items works well for menu translation.
5. *Yuxiang rousi* (鱼香肉丝) is one of the most traditional dishes from Sichuan cuisine. As explained before, *yuxiang* (鱼香) is a kind of complex flavour. *Rou* (肉) means “meat”, meaning pork if not otherwise stated. The character *si* (丝) describes the form of the ingredient, cut into strips. A translation which aligns with our proposed translation criteria is “*Yuxiang* Shredded Pork (Sautéed in Spicy Garlic Sauce)” (Zhao, 2011, p. 33).

6. *Tangcu ji* (糖醋鸡) is a dish composed of certain condiments and ingredients: *Tang* (糖) means “sugar” and *cu* (醋), “vinegar”. *Tangcu* (糖醋) consists of a traditional and common seasoning combination in Chinese gastronomy which produces a complex sweet-and-sour flavor. A translation which illustrates our proposed criteria is “Chicken Braised in Sweet and Sour Sauce” (Zhao, 2011, p. 49). The linguistic and cultural accuracy is maintained while adding the cooking method information.
7. *Xiangsu paigu* (香酥排骨). The ingredient *paigu* (排骨) refers to “pork ribs”. *Su* (酥) means “crispy”, which refers to the texture of the cooked ribs. *Xiang* (香) generally describes the delicious taste or smell of food. The expression *xiangsu* (香酥) is a very common term. An illustrative translation of our criteria is “Crispy Pork Ribs”, which sounds appetizing.
8. *Ganguo feichang* (干锅肥肠) is served in a *ganguo* (干锅), a kind of culinary metal pot from Sichuan cuisine, which in China is representative of a type of Sichuan cuisine, in the same vein as hot pot. *Gan* (干) means “dry” and *guo* (锅) means “pot”. Contrary to hot pot, there is no boiling soup, and the ingredients are preprepared in the pot while serving. The ingredient *feichang* (肥肠) refers to pork intestines. The difficulty translating this dish lies in the lack of equivalence as regard the culinary pot. One translation, “Griddle Pork Intestines” (Zhao, 2011, p. 28), applies “griddle” as solution. Our alternative is “Sautéed Hot Pork Intestines in Dry Pot”. We think that “dry pot” might be easier to associate to the popular hot pot as a more universally acceptable translation.
9. *Liangban jinzhengu* (凉拌金针菇) is a cold dish made from a type of long, thin and white Asian mushroom called *jinzhengu* (金针菇), similar to needles. *Liangban* (凉拌) is a cooking technique for cold dishes, which consists of stirring and mixing the ingredients with seasonings. An appropriate translation is “Needle Mushroom with Sauce” (Zhao, 2011, p. 20).
10. *Mapo doufu* (麻婆豆腐) is a famous dish traditional to Sichuan cuisine. *Mapo* (麻婆) refers to the inventor of this dish from Qing dynasty. *Doufu* (豆腐) is “tofu”. A translation which follows the criteria laid out here is “Mapo Tofu (Sautéed Tofu in Hot and Spicy Sauce)” (Zhao, 2011, p. 91). Keeping the anthroponym in pinyin adds an exotic touch, while culinary accuracy is glossed in the brackets.

### 3.1.2 Figurative names

It is worth attempting to preserve as much as possible the beauty of the images that the figurative names of Chinese dishes have, but we do not recommend

doing this at any cost, because sometimes the name of the dish would not sound appetizing. The following are five examples of Chinese figurative names for dishes.

1. *Hupi fengzhao* (虎皮凤爪) is a dish from Cantonese cuisine. *Feng* (凤) means “phoenix”, and *zhao* (爪) means “feet”; so *fengzhao* (凤爪) literally means “phoenix feet”. This is a widely used metaphor when referring to chicken feet in gastronomic nomenclature, since the figure of the phoenix is considered auspicious in Chinese culture. The name also contains another metaphor: *hupi* (虎皮), which means “tiger skin”. After frying them in oil and putting them in water for several hours, the skin dilates and it has a lot of wrinkles, which resembles the pattern of a tiger skin. So, a translation that would respect the criteria we propose is “Pan-seared chicken feet”.
2. The Sichuan dish name *Mayi shang shu* (蚂蚁上树) is also metaphorical. *Mayi* (蚂蚁) means “ants”, and *shu* (树) means “trees”. The verb *shang* (上) refers to the action of climbing the tree. Therefore, the literal meaning of the dish is “ants climbing trees”. In fact, the “ants” refer to minced pork, and the “trees”, to a kind of Chinese noodle usually made of starch, which are very long and slim. The Italian word “vermicelli” has been widely used to refer to this Chinese noodle because they are similar. In order to respect the criteria of appetite, it is better to focus on culinary accuracy and forget about the ants and is illustrated by the proposal “Sautéed Vermicelli with Spicy Minced Pork” (Zhao, 2011, p. 30).
3. In the previous section we introduced the dish *Fotiaoqiang* (佛跳墙), which is named after a historical tale or legend. This broth is very exquisite and expensive and made from seafood, different kinds of meat, mushrooms and vegetables. “*Fotiaoqiang* (Steamed Abalone with Shark Fin and Fish Maw in Broth)” (Zhao, 2011, p. 10), keeps the pinyin and specifies the most exquisite ingredients. In our opinion, this is a very functional translation.
4. *Fuqi feipian* (夫妻肺片) is one of the ten most renowned classic dishes in Sichuan cuisine, which literally means “the lung of the husband and wife”. This is another classic example of a figurative dish name. *Fuqi* (夫妻) means “husband and wife”, *fei* (肺) means “lungs” and *pian* (片) refers to the slices. The dish actually consists of cold slices of stewed beef, beef stomach, beef tongue and more in a specially made Sichuan chili sauce. The creators of this dish were a married couple from Chengdu, which is the origin of the toponym of the name. As for *fei* (肺), it comes from its homophonic character *fei* (废), which means “wastes”, because they used leftover materials of an ox as ingredients. The dish today is the result of a hundred years of evolution and when translating the historical name, obviously the linguistic accuracy would clearly not be a relevant criterion, otherwise its level of exoticism would gen-

erate panic in foreign eaters. One proposed translation is “Sliced Beef and Ox Tongue in Chili Sauce” (Zhao, 2011, p. 18). On the other hand, Brett Martin, in a 2017’s *GQ* magazine, found its name translated as “Mr. & Mrs. Smith” in a Chinese restaurant in the US. These different translation approaches suggest just how flexible and creative the gastronomic translation could be.

5. *Yushu gua jinqian* (玉树挂金钱) is another metaphorical name, which literally means “coins hung on the tree”. *Yushu* (玉树) is a kind of tree, and *jin-qian* (金钱) refers to “coins”, which is another metaphor of addressing a kind of mushroom in round shape coins. *Gua* (挂) is a verb which means “hang”. There are no direct equivalents in English for these two ingredients. Taking into consideration the criteria of culinary accuracy and exoticism in this case, the proposed translation would be “Chinese Mushrooms with Shanghai green”.

## 4 Conclusion

A gastronomy encodes a culture, and the nomenclature of this gastronomy is considered also an art. Chinese gastronomic nomenclature is an aesthetic art for its visual presentations, tastes and smells, as well as for its language. The language of Chinese food incorporates a great deal of cultural information. On the one hand, the factual elements such as ingredients, color, shape, taste, texture, smell, culinary container, cooking techniques, toponyms and anthroponyms; and, on the other hand, the figurative elements like metaphors, tales, legends and so on, reflect the millenary Chinese gastronomic culture. In short, gastronomy, culture and translation are inextricably related.

Gastronomic translation presents several challenges to reflect the richness presented in the chapter. The lack of equivalences between different culinary cultures regarding ingredients, condiments, culinary techniques, to name a few aspects, requires close attention. Many names cannot be simply translated literally, and translation will depend on the context, the function, the text typology, the audience, etc. Nevertheless, this chapter provides some criteria to help translators in the decision-making process.

Specifically, translators are encouraged to translate Chinese gastronomic nomenclature following four criteria: linguistic accuracy, culinary/cultural accuracy, palatability and exoticism. Each dish name should be analyzed before translating and a balance found for applying these four criteria, although this may vary according to the name.

Linguistic accuracy is important, but in the case of many figurative names, linguistic accuracy is not a priority since a literal translation is not a faithful depiction of the dish. Moreover, when there are no terminological equivalences, linguistic accuracy is a challenge. Translators will need to devote time to explore encyclopedic knowledge to find suitable equivalence.

On the other hand, culinary accuracy is an important criterion since the translation of the gastronomic nomenclature attempts to attract the target readers. An effective approach is to provide accurate culinary information in the translation such as the cooking method (fried, boiled, roasted, etc.). The addition of information regarding whether the dish is cold or hot, signature flavors (salted, sweet, spicy, etc.), special condiments would be highly appreciated by the customers. This implies using translation strategies and methods to compensate the lack of information.

The degree of palatability and exoticism will depend on each case and there is no standard recommendation. In some cases, exoticism will be accepted and more appealing while in other cases it should be toned down. What is important is to take these criteria into account and think about the customer and the function of the translation in order to find a balance between accuracy and practicality of the translation. The difficulties one might encounter in this kind of translation may be very complex, which means that a good deal of cultural knowledge as well as linguistic proficiency are required to produce a high-quality translation. Gastronomic translation has layers that go much deeper than it may seem at first.

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