



# Research on English Translation Strategies of Culture-Loaded Words from the Perspective of Cross-Cultural Communication-Taking “A Bite of China I” as an Example

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**Abstract.** The effective cross-cultural communication of Chinese food culture is closely related to the appropriateness of the translation of related culturally loaded words. Taking the documentary “A Bite of China I” and its English translation as the text, the culture-loaded words are classified into material culture-loaded words and spiritual culture-loaded words, and the English translation strategies adopted by them are studied. The translation strategy that focuses on translation and supplements foreignization is beneficial to cross-cultural communication.

**Keywords:** A Bite of China · culturally-loaded words · translation strategy · cross-cultural communication

## 1 Introduction

In July 2020, China’s Publicity Department stated: “To effectively improve the quality of the external dissemination of Chinese documentaries, we must raise a ‘global public awareness’ and build a new and efficient international discourse dissemination system.” With the continuous development of China’s comprehensive national strength, the voices on the international stage are also needed to be amplified. Chinese culture-loaded words carry a long history and culture of China. Studying the translation strategies and methods of culture-loaded words is conducive to improving the quality of translation, allowing the target audience to better understand Chinese culture, thereby promoting the understanding of Chinese culture. Chinese culture-loaded words present things that are unique to Chinese culture or words, phrases or idioms with Chinese national characteristics and historical background. As a life-recording film and television artwork, documentaries not only truly record a country’s human history, national spirit, lifestyle, social changes and other social phenomena, but also become an important tool for a country’s external communication. The English version of “*A Bite of China*” has achieved unprecedented success abroad, and “*A Bite of China I*” became the overseas sales champion of CCTV’s documentary in 2012. As of January 2013, the overseas distribution reached 2.26 million US dollars [1]. The purpose of this paper is to investigate the translation strategies on culture-loaded words from the perspective of cross-cultural communication.

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## 2 Literature Review

At present, Chinese scholars have studied the culture-loaded words in the documentary series “A Bite of China” from the perspective of skopos theory, reception aesthetics, and ecological translation, but there is little research in this area from the perspective of cross-cultural communication. The perspective of cross-cultural communication is based on the misunderstanding between Chinese and Western cultures, and strives to reduce the problems caused by cultural differences, so as to better allow Chinese culture to go out and allow different cultures to exchange and communicate with each other.

The concept of culture-loaded words was introduced into the field of language and culture studies in 1980 [2], and its concept, however, has not yet been clearly defined. Eugene Nida divided culture-loaded words into five categories, but in different texts, the connotations of culture-loaded words are not the same. The culture-loaded words appearing in “*A Bite of China I*” mainly reflect Chinese culinary culture. Therefore, in this context, this paper classifies the culture-loaded words into material culture-loaded words and spiritual culture-loaded words.

Translators do their best to make the translation faithful to the source language and show all the exoticism of the translated text. At the same time, they also hope that the target audience can understand the beauty of the source language through the translation. Therefore, there are two main types of research strategies on culture-loaded words: domestication strategies centered on the target language, and foreignization strategies centered on the source language.

### 2.1 Domestication

Domestication refers to the translation strategy that adopts a transparent and fluent style of translation and minimizes the strangeness of the original text [3]. Foreignization requires that the translated text conforms to the norms of the target language and culture, and conforms to the way the target language audience speaks, communicates, and recognizes things. Foreignization can quickly allow the target language audience to quickly locate Chinese dishes and food culture based on their own cognition of national food. A common translation strategy under the domestication strategy is free translation. When the connotation of Chinese culture-loaded words is complex and affected by the cultural differences of the target language, it is necessary to transform the cultural connotation contained in the culture-loaded words into explicit words through free translation, and discard the literal meaning.

### 2.2 Foreignization

Foreignization refers to deviating from target-language values, retaining the language and cultural differences of the original language, and making the target language audience feel exotic and experience the charm of the source language culture [3]. Foreignization can convey the cultural connotation contained in Chinese culture-loaded words. However, the output of Chinese culture cannot rely entirely on foreignization, otherwise the

target language audience will be confused and even more unable to understand Chinese food culture. The commonly used translation methods under the foreignization translation strategy include literal translation and transliteration.

In addition to the classification of translation methods under the above two translation strategies, Chinese culture-loaded words undertake the special mission of cross-cultural communication which not only allows the target audience to perceive and accept Chinese culture, but also enables the audience to understand and recognize it. Therefore, only one method used in the English translation of culturally loaded words is not enough. This article will also list the translation methods that combine the two theories of domestication and foreignization- transliteration plus explanation and literal translation plus explanation.

### 3 Material Culture-Loaded Words

In China, food is people's primal want. Various dishes and staple foods undoubtedly reflect the diversity of Chinese people's eating kinds and the long tradition of eating. The Chinese names of dishes are mostly four-character, and most of them reflect the main raw materials and cooking techniques, which are easy to read. For example, “油焖春笋” (Stewed Spring Bamboo Shoots) and “干炒牛河” (Stir-fried Rice Noodles With Beef) appear in “A Bite of China I”. The naming of such dishes is in line with the naming conventions of Western dishes. They are named according to the production methods and materials, and do not carry cultural elements. The literal translation is the best choice. However, some dish names are rich in cultural meaning and pursue the initial good impression that the text brings to the diners [4]. The method of free translation can make the target audience understand the source language to the maximum extent, but at this time, the cultural connotation it represents has to be sacrificed. The Chinese staple food is also unique and has a wide variety, and the target audience can watch visual images of it through documentaries. Thus the method of literal translation as the main, supplemented by free translation can achieve a better cross-cultural communication effect.

E.g.

Source text: 刀板香

Target text: Sliced Salted Pork

The origin of the name of this Chinese dish is related to a historical celebrity in Jixi in Anhui province, namely Hu Zongxian, Minister of War. According to legend, when Hu Zongxian returned to Longchuan in Jixi, he passed by Wenzheng Mountain in Shexian County to visit his teacher. In order to entertain the disciples, the teacher's wife spread the marinated pork on top of the bamboo shoots, and steamed it together on a cutting board. When the dish was cooked, she picked it up and cut it into thin slices, and served it with the board. Hence this dish was named “刀板香”, which means that the cutting board absorbs fragrance, and the dish name has also been used to this day. The board used for this dish is camphorwood. If the Chinese name of this dish is translated to “Aroma in camphorwood”, it does not achieve a good cross-cultural communication function though it retains the cultural characteristics of the special wood board used in

this dish. The “fragrance” in this dish refers to the salty and fresh flavor of pork. The translation is domesticated, directly indicating that the raw material is pork, plus the flavor and shape. Although the unique cultural concept of the source language is not expressed at this time, the target audience’s recognition of the dish, coupled with the visual images, will stimulate interest in tasting or exploring more about it. From this perspective, it is also conducive to cross-cultural communication.

Source text: 裤带面

Target text: Belt noodles

Staple food also occupies an important place in Chinese culinary culture, providing human beings with daily energy since ancient times. With the advancement of time, staple food has also become the main ingredient of specialty snacks all over China. Compared with the western staple foods, mainly bread, potatoes, noodles, and rice, Chinese staple foods contain a rich variety of kinds, rice, noodles, noodles, steamed buns and so on. Both peoples know noodles and rice, the foreignization strategy is adopted for these staple foods, while the concepts of steamed buns, cakes and rice noodles are relatively unfamiliar, so it is better to adopt the domestication strategy. The belt noodles are a special snack of Shaanxi, and the noodles are wide just like a belt. Noodles are not unfamiliar to Western audiences, and the target audience can also directly feel the feature of the width of the noodles from the documentary. Therefore, the use of the foreignization strategy and literal translation method has played a role in promoting the cross-cultural communication of Chinese food.

#### 4 Spiritual Culture-Loaded Words

In addition to the food, audiences can see through the documentary, the more important thing that lies behind it is the long-lasting culinary culture and the unique customs. The process of discovering raw materials and making food represents a long history of civilization, and the hard work of Chinese people endows the food with more flavors. In “*A Bite of China I*”, “luxurious ingredients need only to be cooked simply”, which expresses the Chinese people’s attitude to pursuing a simple life, and shows the cultural characteristics of Chinese food which brings ritual and fun to Chinese people. The story of man and food is also the story of man and nature, showing the concept of harmonious coexistence between man and nature. Therefore, the proper English translation of spiritual culture-loaded words is also one of the reasons for the success of the documentary.

E.g.

Source text: 猎杀不绝

Target text: Always leave something for the next hunt.

This sentence comes from the story of the winter fishing in Chagan Lake in the first episode of “*A Bite of China I*”. The protagonist does not catch all the fish and uses a net with more than 6 inches of mesh to ensure a “great harvest” every winter. The original

text is not like the idiom “顺其自然” (let nature take its course) that appeared in *A Bite of China I*, since this idiom has its equivalent expression in English. And “source text, a Chinese culturally loaded word, reflects the concept of sustainable development. Therefore, the translation adopts the method of domestication strategy and free translation, and has the characteristics of simplicity at the same time. It not only conforms to the shortness of the source text, but also takes into account the short duration of the screen.

Source text: 古人陈赞豆腐“有和德”。

Target text: The ancient people praised it, saying “tofu has merits”.

The ancients had a saying of “Ten Virtues”, in which the climate does not suit one and the food which makes discomfort disappear has the virtue of harmony. Tofu is transformed from soybeans, avoiding the adverse body reactions caused by directly eating soybeans. Tofu can be used both as a main dish and as a side dish with other ingredients without changing the flavor of the dish. The concept of “harmonious virtue” is not familiar to native Chinese speakers, and it is a rather strange concept to the target audience. Its cultural connotation is that tofu transformed from soybeans can remove the discomforts caused by an unaccustomed climate. Therefore, the method of naturalization and free translation is adopted. However, this method means sacrifices in the loss of cultural connotation of tofu to a large extent, and it is a better choice to further explain its implying meaning. “tofu, both the main course and an ingredient, has the quality of removing discomfort caused by the unaccustomed climate” is added as an illustration.

Source text: 靠山吃山, 靠海吃海。

Target text: One has to make use of the local resources available.

The meaning of the source text is to use the local resources you have no matter where you are, reflecting the idea of adapting to local conditions. The translation can be quickly understood by the target audience, but the translation does not contain any cultural factors. “山(mountain)” and “海(sea)” are translated into “resources”, and the symmetrical structure of Chinese is not preserved. The information conveyed by the translation to the target audience is very accurate, but from the perspective of cross-cultural communication, Chinese culture is lost. Another translation version, “you live on the mountain, you live off the mountain. And if you live by the sea, you live off the sea.” is worse than the provided translation although it has more Chinese cultural information. Based on the cross-culture translation, the priority is given to the targeted audiences’ understanding.

## 5 Conclusion

This paper divides the culture-loaded words in “*A Bite of China I*” into two categories: material and spiritual, and discusses the translation strategies and methods. Though such classification is clear, it’s hard to identify some source texts. Meanwhile, this classification also cannot cover all culture-loaded words appearing in *A Bite of China I*. There are culture-loaded words that contain profound cultural heritage, but the unfamiliar

concept and the instantaneity of flowing motion pictures. The cultural connotation unique to Chinese culture is expected to be omitted. Through analysis, it is found that the translation strategy of culture-loaded words is mainly domestication, supplemented by foreignization. Meanwhile, domestication combined with foreignization is applied to some specific words to help the target audience better understand the cultural information carried by the source text, [5] so as to facilitate cross-cultural communication. But the strategies to minimize the cultural loss need further research while the information is conveyed to the targeted audience clearly.

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