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# An Analysis of English Translations of Sichuan Cuisine from the Perspective of Cross-Cultural Communication: A Case Study of “*Fuqi Feipian*”

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**Abstract:** With the continuous advancement of globalization, the international dissemination of Chinese food culture has become increasingly important. The translation of Sichuan cuisine culture is a work of great significance. This paper focuses on *Fuqi Feipian*, a classic dish of Sichuan cuisine, and explores its importance in the translation of food culture. Firstly, it introduces the Eight Major Cuisines of Chinese food and the status of Sichuan cuisine, emphasizing the crucial role of translating *Fuqi Feipian* in promoting Chinese food culture. Subsequently, it elaborates on the origin and rich cultural connotations of *Fuqi Feipian*. Then, it conducts an in-depth analysis of the application of Yan Fu's translation principles of “Faithfulness, Expressiveness, and Elegance” in the translation of *Fuqi Feipian*, while citing examples of mistranslations and pointing out the existing problem—the separation of language and culture. Finally, it proposes that the correct translation method should be transliteration with annotation, aiming to promote the cross-cultural communication of Sichuan cuisine culture and thereby facilitate the exchange and integration among different cultures.

**Keywords:** Sichuan cuisine culture; Cross-cultural communication; *Fuqi Feipian*; Translation principles

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**Online publication:** January 26, 2026

## 1. Introduction

Chinese cuisine enjoys a worldwide reputation, with a long-standing and profound food culture. Shaped by a combination of factors such as natural conditions, local resources, and dietary habits, the highly representative “Eight Major Cuisines” have gradually taken shape. As one of the Eight Major Cuisines in China, Sichuan cuisine occupies an important position in the global culinary arena due to its unique flavors and rich cultural connotations. With the continuous advancement of globalization and increasingly frequent international cultural exchanges, the translation of Sichuan cuisine culture has become a crucial link in disseminating Chinese food culture. As a classic representative dish of Sichuan cuisine, the English translation of *Fuqi Feipian* is not only related to the international recognition and acceptance of the dish itself, but also reflects, to a certain extent, the standard of translation for Sichuan cuisine culture and even Chinese food culture as a whole. Accurate and appropriate translation can help foreign friends better understand the characteristics and charm of

*Fuqi Feipian*, thereby stimulating their interest in and love for Sichuan cuisine culture and Chinese culture at large <sup>[1]</sup>.

## 2. Origin and cultural connotations of Fuqi Feipian

### 2.1. Origin

In the 1930s, a couple named Guo Chaohua and Zhang Tianzheng, hailing from Zhongjiang, Sichuan, opened a beef offal shop on Changshun Street and Jinhe Street in Chengdu, selling a dish called “*Penpen Rou*” (also known as “*Liangtuo Wang*”). Later, they continuously improved the recipe for “*Penpen Rou*.” They cleaned and sliced beef offal, such as scraps from beef shops, and mixed them with seasonings like chili oil and Sichuan peppercorn powder to make a cold beef offal salad. Thanks to its unique flavor, this dish quickly gained popularity on the streets of Chengdu. Initially named “*Niurou Fei Pian*” (Beef Scraps), the character “*Fei*” (scraps/waste) was later changed to “*Fei*” (lung) to make the name more pleasant-sounding. Additionally, the calligrapher Zhao Yunyu presented them with a gold-lettered plaque inscribed with his own handwriting: “*Fuqi Feipian*.” The couple then began peddling the dish under the name, and its fame spread far and wide <sup>[2]</sup>.

### 2.2. Cultural connotations

As a time-honored Sichuan dish with profound cultural heritage, *Fuqi Feipian* embodies rich and diverse cultural connotations.

Firstly, the term “*Fuqi*” (husband and wife) in the name implies the cooperation and tacit understanding between a couple. In those difficult times, Guo Chaohua and Zhang Tianzheng joined hands to start their business and jointly brought this delicious cold beef offal salad to the market. Their story embodies the spirit of mutual support and joint struggle between husband and wife in traditional Chinese culture, adding a touch of warmth and romance to the dish <sup>[3]</sup>.

Secondly, as a classic Sichuan dish, *Fuqi Feipian* fully reflects the characteristics of Sichuan food culture. In terms of ingredient selection, it uses beef offal such as beef, beef heart, and beef tripe, which are very common in Sichuan. After being marinated and served cold, these ingredients taste delicious and chewy. In terms of seasoning, it makes extensive use of Sichuan-style condiments like chili oil and Sichuan peppercorn powder, which endow the dish with a strong numbing and spicy flavor that leaves a lasting impression. In terms of cooking techniques, *Fuqi Feipian* emphasizes meticulous ingredient selection, exquisite knife skills, and unique seasoning, fully demonstrating the superb craftsmanship of Sichuan chefs. It also reflects the Sichuan food culture’s extreme pursuit of taste and the tradition of skillfully using condiments to showcase local flavors.

Finally, the development of *Fuqi Feipian* reflects the inheritance and innovation of Chinese folk cuisine. Over the past few decades, it has been continuously improved and innovated. Not only has the selection of ingredients become more diverse, but bold attempts have also been made in cooking techniques and seasoning methods.

Today, *Fuqi Feipian* has become an iconic dish of Sichuan cuisine. It is widely popular domestically and won acclaim from numerous diners internationally. As an ambassador of Chinese culture, it has spread across different regions and countries, allowing more people to understand and appreciate the charm of Sichuan food culture and traditional Chinese culture.

## 3. Translation principles for Fuqi Feipian

Yan Fu’s translation principles of “Faithfulness, Expressiveness, and Elegance” occupy an important position in the history of Chinese translation <sup>[4]</sup>. “Faithfulness” refers to fidelity and accuracy, requiring the translation to be faithful to the original text in terms of content, ideas, style, etc., including accurate translation of vocabulary, consistent sentence structure, and faithful reflection of the author’s intention. “Expressiveness” means fluency and coherence; the translation should conform

to the expression habits of the target language, with appropriate vocabulary, reasonable sentence structure, and coherent discourse. “Elegance” denotes refinement and grace; the translation should be literary, using expressive vocabulary, varied sentence patterns, and rhetorical devices to enhance its literary quality and appeal. These three principles are organically unified and jointly guide translation practice. They should also be applied when translating the dish name “*Fuqi Feipian*.”

### **3.1. Faithfulness**

Faithfulness requires the accurate conveyance of the dish’s main ingredients. The primary ingredients of *Fuqi Feipian* are beef offal such as beef, beef heart, and beef tripe. The translation should clearly specify these ingredients to avoid misunderstandings. Additionally, it should accurately convey the dish’s preparation method. *Fuqi Feipian* is made through steps such as marinating, slicing, and seasoning. These processes can be reflected in the translation to help foreign friends better understand how the dish is prepared.

### **3.2. Expressiveness**

This principle requires the translation to conform to the expression habits of the target language. Due to differences in expression between English and Chinese, the translation should follow English usage to ensure naturalness and fluency. The purpose of translation is to enable foreign friends to understand the name and characteristics of the dish; therefore, the translation should be concise, clear, and easy to understand.

### **3.3. Elegance**

This principle emphasizes the aesthetic quality of the translation of “*Fuqi Feipian*.” Translation should not only accurately convey information but also focus on the beauty of the target text. Vivid and expressive words and phrasing can be used to enhance the elegance of the translation. In addition, it is necessary to reflect the rich cultural connotations inherent in the name. The translation should endeavor to embody these cultural connotations as much as possible <sup>[5]</sup>.

## **4. Mistranslations of *Fuqi Feipian* and existing problems**

### **4.1. Examples and analysis of mistranslations**

#### **4.1.1. Translation 1: “Husband and wife’s lung slice”**

This translation is a relatively traditional version of the dish. However, it is an error caused by excessive literal translation and seriously violates the principle of “Faithfulness” among Yan Fu’s translation principles. From the literal meaning, it is indeed easy to interpret it as “lung slices of a husband and wife.” In reality, however, what it truly intends to convey is “lung slices made by a couple.” This divergence between literal meaning and actual referential meaning is a major cause of mistranslation. Such a translation version will not only arouse unnecessary fear and disgust but also lead to a wrong perception of Chinese food culture. Therefore, this mistranslation completely fails to consider cultural differences and linguistic habits, and is merely a simple literal translation.

#### **4.1.2. Translation 2: “The special features mixes cow internal organs”**

This is a translation version of *Fuqi Feipian* found on the menu of a restaurant in Chengdu, Sichuan. There are two main problems with this translation: First, the agent of the action “mix” should be a person, not “special features.” Therefore, the active voice “mixes” is inappropriate here. Moreover, the intention is to emphasize the composition of *Fuqi Feipian* rather than the action of mixing. This reversal of priorities results in a violation of the principle of Faithfulness. Second, the English expression for “beef offal” (“cow internal organs”) is overly Chinglish. This not only loses the romantic connotation inherent in the name “*Fuqi Feipian*” but also easily evokes unpleasant associations with bloody internal organs, spoiling diners’ appetites. Thus, this translation also violates the principle of Elegance <sup>[6]</sup>.

#### **4.1.3. Translation 3: “Pork lungs in chili sauce”**

This translation is one of the translation versions on Youdao Translation. It seriously violates the key principle of Faithfulness. The word “pork” refers to the meat of pigs, whereas in reality, *Fuqi Feipian* is made from beef offal such as beef, beef heart, beef tongue, and beef tripe. This mistake means the translation completely fails to accurately convey the dish’s main ingredients, deviating drastically from the original. It is highly likely to cause significant misunderstandings among foreign friends who are unfamiliar with Chinese cuisine.

#### **4.1.4. Translation 4: “Beef and ox tripe in chili sauce”**

To improve service and reception standards during the Olympic Games and standardize English translations of menus in Beijing’s hotel and catering industry, the *English Translation of Chinese Menu* was compiled and published by the Foreign Affairs Office of the Beijing Municipal Government and the Beijing Municipal Bureau of Tourism. This translation was established as the official version for *Fuqi Feipian*. From a methodological perspective, it adopts a literal translation of the ingredients and seasonings, which aligns with Western naming conventions for dishes. However, it still has certain limitations. Although it clearly conveys the main components of the dish, it neglects the transmission of cultural connotations. Therefore, while this translation adheres to the principles of “Faithfulness” and “Expressiveness,” it fails to achieve the principle of “Elegance.”

### **4.2. Existing problem: The separation of language and culture**

Based on the above translations, it can be concluded that the common problem in their translation is the failure to achieve unity between language and culture. The reasons are as follows:

#### **4.2.1. Linguistic level**

Literal word-for-word translation results in stiff and unnatural language that does not conform to English expression habits. For example, Translation 1 is translated entirely according to Chinese word order and vocabulary, without considering English grammar and collocation rules.

In addition, Translations 1, 2, and 3 all fail to accurately convey the dish’s main ingredients and characteristics. Translation 1 only emphasizes “husband and wife” and “lung slices.” Translation 2 uses an overly general term for beef offal and fails to mention that the dish is actually made from beef, beef heart, beef tongue, and other beef offal. Translation 3 misidentifies the raw ingredients entirely. Furthermore, the first two translations do not reflect the numbing, spicy, fresh, and aromatic flavor profile of *Fuqi Feipian*. This unique flavor is created by a careful combination of various seasonings, such as chili oil, Sichuan peppercorn powder, and garlic paste. These seasonings endow *Fuqi Feipian* with a rich fragrance, stimulating spiciness, and a mellow texture. Failing to convey these flavor characteristics prevents foreign diners from perceiving the dish’s unique taste from the translation and from accurately judging whether they will enjoy the dish when ordering.

#### **4.2.2. Cultural level**

All four translations ignore the cultural connotations inherent in the dish’s name, resulting in a separation between language and culture. The term “*Fuqi*” (husband and wife) in “*Fuqi Feipian*” refers not only to the dish’s creators but also embodies the spirit of cooperation and struggle between a couple, as well as the emphasis on family in traditional Chinese culture. However, the four translations only focus on the literal meaning and fail to convey these cultural connotations. Consequently, they cannot help foreign diners understand the story and cultural background behind the dish. The story of the origin and development of *Fuqi Feipian* reflects the history, culture, and way of life of the people in Sichuan. Yet mistranslations prevent foreign friends from learning about this background information, thereby affecting their understanding and appreciation of the dish.

## 5. The correct translation of Fuqi Feipian

Based on the analysis of different mistranslated versions in the previous chapter, and in accordance with Yan Fu's translation principles of "Faithfulness, Expressiveness, and Elegance," the author believes that the optimal translation for *Fuqi Feipian* should adopt the method of transliteration with annotation. This approach not only preserves the cultural characteristics of the dish but also enables foreign friends to understand its content. Referring to this method, "*Fuqi Feipian*" can be re-translated as follows: "*Fuqi Feipian* (Sliced beef and ox offal prepared by a couple, a famous Sichuan dish with spicy and numbing flavors)."

This translation conforms to the principles of "Faithfulness, Expressiveness, and Elegance." In terms of Faithfulness, it accurately states the key elements: the dish was created by a couple, consists of sliced beef and ox offal, is a famous Sichuan cuisine, and features spicy and numbing flavors, thus being completely faithful to the original content. On the level of Expressiveness, the language in the annotation is smooth and fluent, conforming to English expression habits, allowing foreign readers to easily understand the meaning and characteristics of the dish. From the perspective of Elegance, the transliteration part retains the unique charm of the Chinese name, while the annotation is elaborated in relatively formal and elegant language, possessing a certain artistic appeal.

## 6. Conclusion

As a classic representative of Sichuan cuisine, the accurate translation of *Fuqi Feipian* plays an indispensable role in disseminating Sichuan cuisine culture and even Chinese food culture. Through the analysis of its origin, cultural connotations, translation principles, mistranslations, and correct translation, we can deeply recognize the necessity of adhering to the principles of "Faithfulness, Expressiveness, and Elegance" in the translation process. Some current mistranslated versions violate these principles to varying degrees, resulting in the separation of language and culture.

The translation "*Fuqi Feipian* (Sliced Beef and Ox Offal Prepared by a Couple, a famous Sichuan dish with spicy and numbing flavors)" using the transliteration-with-annotation method is expected to provide a good example for the translation of *Fuqi Feipian*. It not only retains the characteristics of the original Chinese name but also introduces the dish's preparation, features, and cultural background in detail through annotations, achieving the organic unity of language and culture.

In future food culture translation, we should pay more attention to the excavation and accurate transmission of the cultural connotations of dishes, and use more scientific and reasonable translation methods to showcase China's rich and diverse food culture to the world. Let Chinese delicacies become a bridge to promote international cultural exchanges and enhance mutual understanding among people of all countries, contributing to the dissemination of Chinese culture to the world.

## Disclosure statement

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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