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Translating (and rewriting) Jane Austen's food across time and space

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ABSTRACT

This study incorporates House's TQA framework into corpus-based translation studies to evaluate how Jane Austen's depictions of food have been translated and perceived within Chinese contexts. This study's dataset includes a Jane Austen corpus in English compiled by Lancaster University and our self-built diachronic corpus of Austen's translations in Chinese from 1935 onwards. Our study shows that translations of Austen's references to food require a dynamicity that bridges time and space and which links cultures and languages; the translations create texts that are novel and original to Chinese audiences. Different strategies have been used by translators to connect food culture in Austen's era to contemporary China. Translations initially recreated and domesticated original textual references within Chinese culture, while later translations were more contemporary and closer to modern day Western dishes and customs. This study also shows that terminological inconsistency, translation loss, and mistranslation have existed in Chinese translations of Austen since 1935. This research outlines how translators have bridged the temporal distance and cultural space between the epochs of 19th century Britain and modern China in the context of literary depictions of food.

KEYWORDS


Jane Austen; translation quality assessment; food translation; diachronic corpus; food culture

Introduction

Jane Austen has been regarded as one of the most popular English language novelists for more than 200 years. However, her works remained entirely unknown to Chinese readers until 1935, when two versions of *Pride and Prejudice* were translated into Chinese and published in the same year but by different publishers (Sun 2020). Today, her works have attracted increasing numbers of Chinese readers and a greater degree of academic attention; all six of her completed novels have been translated into Chinese, and each novel has been translated many times. For example, there are more than 60 different retranslations of *Pride and Prejudice*.

According to CNKI,¹ China's largest academic digital database, there are over 2000 Jane Austen-related academic publications whose literary perspectives include themes such as marriage, psychology, feminism, and love; however, there are only 73 studies that use translation perspectives. Translation-based research that focuses on food and food-related themes within Austen's oeuvre are even rarer. This is further evidenced by Li

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and Salama-Carr ([forthcoming](#) survey of current research in translation studies from a range of multiple electronic databases globally – the Web of Science, Scopus, TSB (Translation Studies Bibliography), and BITRA (Bibliography of Interpreting and Translation). Their results indicate that less than one per cent of academic translation-based articles are food-related. Therefore, they call for urgent and more systematic interdisciplinary forms of food-related translation research to identify the contemporary resonances of translation studies research, including classic literature, on modern readerships from food culture perspectives. So far, different facets of Austen, the writer, emerge from the way her translators construct her in different languages and cultures, and across different points in time and space (Lee 2012). For example, in Austen's work, food and food scenes were sometimes used to "define character," "forward the plot," and "enhance" certain themes. However, there has been very little research on the specifics of food in Austen's writing and its translation (Lane 1995; Lee 2012; Li 2021). This study aims to fill these gaps; we aim to answer the following research questions:

- (1) What kinds of food, in British culture, are highlighted and reflected in Austen's novels according to Lancaster's Austen Corpus and our self-built diachronic corpus of Austen's translations in Chinese?
- (2) In the context of Juliane House's functional linguistic TQA framework, how have translators across time – from 1935 onwards – translated and represented 19th century British food to modern Chinese audiences?
- (3) What translation strategies have been employed by Chinese translators in different decades?

Food itself is both culturally and regionally bounded, and is sometimes historically constrained; therefore, it poses significant challenges to translators and is sometimes considered untranslatable (Desjardins, Cooke, and Charron 2015; Garzone 2017; Li 2021). When translating Austen's references to British food from 200 years ago – the taste of the old days – it is unsurprising that translators are faced with the challenge of depicting "a new situation in which novelty and originality must be captured with reliable precision and nuance" (Tihanov 2018, 21). This is particularly the case when Austen's works are translated into Chinese. This article uses House (2015) functional linguistic translation quality assessment (TQA) approach to assess the diachronic Chinese translations (from 1935 onwards) of Austen's references to British food.

The study: a specialized diachronic Chinese translation corpus of Austen's works

The integration of TQA and corpus-based methods is mutually beneficial. A corpus-based approach allows us to quickly identify translators' voices and translation strategies by investigating the lexical, syntactic, and discourse features identified in translation corpora (Baker 1996). Our evaluations of translating food and food references are based on the datasets of two corpora: the English corpus of Jane Austen's works compiled by Lancaster University, which includes all six novels that were published by Austen (Brezina, Weill-Tessier, and McEnery 2020); in addition, our self-built Chinese diachronic Austen corpus includes different translated versions of Austen's six novels.

To compile a balanced and sizable diachronic Austen translation corpus (see Appendix 1), we used the following selection criteria: 1) representativeness and inclusiveness of all Chinese translations from 1935 onwards to form a sizable corpus; 2) the selection timeline includes one available translated version of each novel from each decade; 3) Zhili Sun is the only translator who has translated all six novels by Austen; thus, we have included all his translation works to ensure continuity and consistency in the corpus.

Only one novel by Austen – *Pride and Prejudice* – was translated into Chinese in 1935, before the establishment of the People’s Republic of China in 1949. Bin Yang started to translate *Pride and Prejudice* in 1930 and published his translation, entitled “傲慢與偏見 (ào màn yǔ piān jiàn: arrogance and prejudice),” in 1935 with Shanghai Commercial Press. In the same year, Zhongchi Dong published his translated version, with a slightly different title, “驕傲與偏見” (jiāo ào yǔ piān jiàn: pride and prejudice), with University Press in Beijing. Some scholars argue that Dong’s translation contains numerous mistakes (Wang and Li 2021), and thus we have not included his translation in the corpus. Bin Yang translated the title of *Pride and Prejudice* as “傲慢與偏見;” this translation was adopted later in all Chinese translations of *Pride and Prejudice*, including publications in Taiwan. For this reason, Bin Yang’s translation was selected for inclusion in the diachronic translation corpus. Five translated versions of *Pride and Prejudice*, which were published in 1935, 1955, 1993, 2008, and 2017, are included in the translation corpus. Although we did not include translations published in Taiwan in our self-built corpus, it worth mentioning that five translated versions – by Zhicheng Zhang (1971), Daiyi Dai (1975), Zhichang Chen (1976), Yinghui Xia (1983), and Hanmin Qian (1988) – have been published in Taiwan so far.

Sense and Sensibility was first translated in 1983 by Yutang Wang. Today, there are over 40 different translated versions, and it is the second most translated novel by Austen. For the corpus, we randomly selected translated versions that were published in 1983, 1995, 2001 and 2015.

Emma was first translated in 1949 by Zhongde Liu, and he also retranslated his own version in 1982. Today, there are almost 30 different translated Chinese versions – although there were no published translations in the 1970s at all. The selected translations were published in 1949, 1984, 1997, 2005, and 2017, respectively.

The first published translation of *Northanger Abbey* in Chinese was by Qiaozhi Ma in 1958; to date, there have been 11 translated versions. The translated versions from 1958, 1986, 1997, 2000, and 2014 were selected for the corpus. *Persuasion* and *Mansfield Park* were both first translated into Chinese in the 1980s; since then, 9 and 13 translated versions respectively have been recorded. We have chosen publications from 1984, 1991, 2009, and 2014 for *Persuasion*; and from 1984, 1998, 2009, and 2014 for *Mansfield Park*.

To build the corpus, all selected translated versions were scanned and then converted to txt documents by using OCR. LF Aligner (Farkas 2010) – a bilingual corpora aligning tool – was used to establish a translation relation among different translated versions at paragraph levels and cleaned manually afterwards. LancsBox tool (a software package for the analysis of language data and corpora, which was developed by Lancaster University), was used for this initial stage of corpus data processing, as it is easy to operate, it facilitates comparisons between newly created corpora and existing ones, and has automatic Part-of-Speech tagging functions (Brezina, Weill-Tessier, and McEney 2020). We then used a more advanced search engine, CQPweb (Lancaster University), for further corpus analysis with reference to food. The following section discusses three cases of food reference data elucidated from the corpora.

Translating and rewriting Austen's British food and food scenes across time and space in China

The corpus data related to food references in Austen's novels show that a total of 9 different types of vegetables (e.g. asparagus, arrowroot, beetroot, carrots, celery, parsnip, turnip, cucumber, salad), 13 kinds of fruits (e.g. apples, apricots, cherries, currants, gooseberries, grapes, mulberries, nectarines, olives, peaches, pineapples, strawberries, plums), 19 different types of desserts, puddings, and preserves (e.g. apple dumpling/tart, apricot preserve/tart/marmalade, wedding cakes, Rout cakes, gooseberry tart, jellies, muffin, and apple pudding), 10 different types of staple food (e.g. bread, rice, potatoes), 11 varieties of drinks, and 31 different types of meat- and fish-related dishes were used in Austen's novels. Many of these references are geographically and culturally specific to the British Isles and have represented a unique challenge to Chinese translators over the decades. But translation has played a crucial role in the growing popularity of Jane Austen's work in China (Sun 2020). When food and culinary references are extracted from corpora focusing on Austen's novels and then analysed, they indicate the impact that literary translation has had upon the development of world food culture, and on new terminology formation in China and beyond. Three facets of this are of particular interest.

Case study 1: translating Austen's references to meals and dishes across time

Translations of Austen's food references reveal the "discursive, social and ideological conventions, norms and constraints" of another food culture (Schäffner 2004, 137). Today, the study of Austen's treatment of food yields new insights into a family's "socio-economic status" (Lane 1995; Penton 2016; Welsh 2017). Through translation, we travel across time and space, interrogating the original words and bringing them to our time and place. The data shows that mutton, lamb, pork, game, venison, pigeon, turkey, goose, etc., have been described as elements of dishes in Austen's era. "Mutton" e.g. roast mutton, the saddle of mutton, a slice of mutton, broiled mutton, a leg of mutton, shoulder of mutton) is referenced many times in Austen's six novels, for instance. Mutton – adult sheep – has become a less common food in Britain as the meat is tougher and fatty, although it was once a popular British dish, not least in Austen's times. However, since 1925, the consumption of lamb (young sheep) started to become a social norm and it appeared more frequently on menus, gradually replacing mutton according to Kennard (2014). However, it was not until recent decades that average Chinese families had enough meat of any kind; therefore, mutton is still a type of popular meat in China today. This particular term, therefore, would have potentially elicited different socio-economic inferences for mid-/late- 20th century British readers, for example (regarding an increasingly unfashionable cut of meat), compared with Chinese readerships who might also have encountered the translated term when reading Austen's works at similar stages of the last century.

The corpus data indicates that Austen uses different food terminologies, such as the taste and texture of meat (e.g. greasy, delicate), diverse cooking and preservation methods (fried, roast, dressed, boiled, salted, over-salted), different cuts of meat such as pork (loin, leg, steak, hind-quarter). These are often evocative descriptions that fuel the

imaginings of readers as regards the preparation and tasting of the food; they also vividly depict the domestic life of Austen's characters and shed light on prevailing social norms as shown in Example 1. Through the dialogues of the two characters, Emma (an engaging but sometimes self-indulgent young woman) and Mr. Woodhouse (Emma's father who is a hypochondriac but a kind-hearted older man), Austen's portrayal of food traditions not only depicts the uniqueness of her characters but also indicates how their mindsets reflect broader socio-ideological conventions of sending gifts of food to poorer neighbours. Woodhouse's scrupulousness regarding how the others should cook, preserve, and eat the pork shows that he considers food to be a serious issue and "indeed a danger" (Bartlett 2021, 120). The translation of these terminologies and the narrators' voices can be seen in Table 1.

Example 1: Now we have killed a porker, and Emma thinks of sending them a loin or a leg; it is very small and delicate – Hartfield pork is not like any other **pork**—but still it is pork – and, my dear Emma, unless one could be sure of their making it into steaks, nicely fried, as ours are fried, without the smallest grease, and not roast it, for no stomach can bear roast pork – I think we had better send the leg – do not you think so, my dear?" "My dear papa, I sent the whole hind-quarter. I knew you would wish it. There will be the leg to be salted, you know, which is so very nice, and the loin to be dressed directly in any manner they like. (EMMA, VOLUME II, Chapter.3)

The detail in Example 1 evokes the pleasure of a gourmet relishing the range of possibilities afforded by the pork, and it reflects the argument that reading Austen's food in translation brings many readers closer to her era, perhaps eliciting both a desire towards the food portrayed and also that of reading more of Austen's works (Yue and Tang 2016). In translating these food terms and food references into Chinese, as we can see from Table 1, many food terms and references have been translated differently (and sometimes incorrectly) over time. A Porker, a young and fattened pig, for example, has been translated as "一個(a)小(small)肥(fat), 一頭(a)小(small)豬(pig), 一頭(a)小(small)肥(fat)豬(pig), 一口(a)肉(fat)豬(pig), 一头(a)小(small)豬(pig)" respectively. The translators not only chose to use different classifiers "個, 頭, 口," which indicate the complexity of the use of classifiers in the Chinese language, but also used different translation strategies and registers; some translations are more accurate than others. This is particularly the case for Li & Cai whose use of "肉豬" means any fattened pigs, but not necessarily young. Translating the cut of meat is another challenge for the Chinese translators due to cultural variations in naming different cuts of meat between China and the UK. A "loin of pork" in the Oxford Dictionary is defined as a "joint of meat that includes the vertebrae of the loins." Therefore, this phrase can be translated as "裡脊肉" (tenderloin) or "腰肉" (loin); however, the five translators have translated it as "一塊(a piece of) 腰(loin) 肉(meat)," "裡脊肉(tenderloin)," "一塊(a piece of)腰(loin)肉(meat)," "一塊(a piece of)肋(rib)肉(meat)," "一塊(a piece of)肋(rib)條(slice) 肉(meat)" – see below for translation quality evaluation. It is perhaps significant that the post-2000 translators opt for "ribs" as a translation, a cut of meat from a similar area to that of "loin," but more recognizable to new millennium Chinese readerships (and beyond) as an appetizing cut of meat.

Table 1. Different translated versions of food scene in Example 1 marked in bold.

T1: Liu, 1949	Chinese	現在(now)我們(we)已經(already)宰了(killed)一個(a)小(small)肥(fat)了, 愛瑪(Emma)也(also)想到(wish)送(send)她們(they)一塊(a)腰肉(loin)或(or)一隻(a)腿(leg)了。
	Back Translation	Now we already killed a small fat, Emma also wishes to send them a loin or a leg.
T2: Zhang, 1984	Chinese	我們(now)剛(just)宰了(killed)一頭(a)小(small)豬(pig), 愛瑪(Emma)想(wish)把(a sentence marker)里脊肉(tenderloin)或(or)腿(leg)給(give)她們(they)。
	Back Translation	Now we just killed a small pig, Emma wishes to send tenderloin or leg to them.
T3: Sun, Y., 1997	Chinese	現在(now)我們(we)已經(already)宰了(killed)一頭(a)小(small)肥(fat)豬(pig), 愛瑪(Emma)想(wish)送(send)她們(they)一塊(a)腰肉(loin)或者(or)一只(a)腿(leg)。
	Back Translation	Now we already killed a small fat pig, Emma wishes to send them a loin or a leg.
T4: Li and Cai, 2005	Chinese	我們(we)剛好(just)宰殺了(killed)一口(a)肉(meaty)豬(pig), 於是(then)愛瑪(Emma)便(by the way)想到(think)送給(send)她們(they)一塊(a)肋(rib)肉(meat)或是(or)一條(a)豬(pig)腿(leg)。
	Back Translation	We just killed a meaty pig, then Emma wanted to send them a piece of rib meat or a leg.
T5: Z. Sun, 2017	Chinese	我們(we)剛剛(just)宰了(killed)一頭(a)小(small)豬(pig), 愛瑪(Emma)想(wish)送(send)她們(they)一塊(a)肋(rib)條(slice)肉(meat)或(or)一條(a)豬(pig)腿(leg)。
	Back Translation	We just killed a small pig, Emma wishes to send them a slice of rib meat or a leg.

Table 2. Different translated versions of Example 2 marked in bold.

T1:Yang, 1935	Chinese translation	我(I)猜(guess)她(he)家裏(family)等著(wait)她(her)去(go)做(do)豬排(pork steak)。
	Back translation	I guess her family are waiting for her to cook pork steak.
T2:Dong, 1935	Chinese translation	我們(we)想(think)她(her)要(want)三個(three)細饅首(steamed buns)。
	Back translation	We think she wants three steamed buns.
T3:Wang, 1955	Chinese translation	據(according to)我(me)猜想(guess), 大概(perhaps)是(is)她(her)家里(family)街頭(street corner)等著(wait)她(her)回去(go back)做(make)肉(meat)餅(pies)。
	Back translation	I guess her home at the street corner is waiting for her to go back to cook meat pies.
T4:Zhang & Zhang, 1993	Chinese translation	我(I)猜想(guess), 是(is)家里(family)等著(wait)她(her)回去(go back)做(make)肉末(mince)餡(fillings)餅(pies)。
	Back translation	I guess her family are waiting for her to go back to cook mince pies.
T5:Liu, 2008	Chinese translation	我(I)想(guess)也許(perhaps)是(is)她(her)家里(family)在等著(is waiting)她(her)回家(go back home)做(make)肉(meat)餅(pies)吧。
	Back translation	I guess her family are waiting for her to go back home to cook meat pies.
T6:Sun, 2017	Chinese translation	我(I)猜想(guess), 家里(family)要(want)她(her)回去(go back)做(make)餡(fillings)餅(pies)。
	Back translation	I guess her family want her to go back to make pies.

In *Pride and Prejudice*, Mrs Bennett emphasises her family's relatively elevated socio-economic status, boasting several times that her girls have been brought up differently from her neighbour Charlotte Lucas who needs to help to cook "the mince pies" as in Example 2.

Example 2: No, she would go home. I fancy she was wanted about the mince pies. For my part, Mr. Bingley, I always keep servants that can do their own work; my daughters are brought up differently. (*Pride and Prejudice*, p.9)

A pie, according to the Oxford Learner's Dictionary, is "a baked dish of fruit or meat and/or vegetables with pastry on the bottom, sides and top." Pies can have different contents, such as fruit (apple, raspberry), or meat (minced meat, pigeon, fowl, beef, lamb). There are only limited similarities with (餅 bǐng), "Chinese pastry with fillings inside," because Chinese "bǐng" refer more to wheat flour-based food with a flattened or disk-like shape; they resemble flatbreads, pastries, biscuits, pancakes, and pies depending on how "bǐng" are cooked in China. A mince pie is traditionally served during Christmas in the British Isles. Although the earliest forms of mince pies contained meat, they started to become sweeter and more fruit-based in the 18th century as imports of sugar increased (Hirst 2011), and this latter version of mince pies is more likely to have been the type referenced by Austen in the early 19th century. However, in this example, "mince pies" have been variously translated as "豬排" (steak), 細饅首 (steamed bun), 肉餅 (meat pie), 肉末餡餅 (mince pie, 餡餅 ([Chinese] mince pie) as can be seen from Table 2. This reveals different translation strategies such as domestication, or sometimes errors in the translation. These mistakes are perhaps induced by the word "mince" which – on its own – refers to minced meat such as beef or pork. The two 1935 wartime translations (during the Japanese invasion) of mince pie are as 豬排 (steak), 細饅首 (steamed bun) respectively; this could be due to the two translators having limited access to resources such as reference dictionaries because the authors were "hiding away from Japanese persecution" (Dong 1935).

Case study 2: cosmopolitan translations of Austen's references to food

Chinese translators mediate and translate the discursive element of food references in Austen's era, conveying them from one geographic context to another. The broader socio-cultural context in modern China further influences the work of translators, resulting in increasingly globalized and cosmopolitan ways of conveying foreign foods as China increasingly engages with Western food and foodways. Sandwiches and cakes, for example, are cases in point. Cakes, including wedding cakes, rout-cake, and sweet-cake, appear nine times in the corpus. In depicting Mr Woodhouse's character as "self-centred" and "maddening but lovable," Austen explains that "there was a strange rumour in Highbury of all the little Perrys being seen with a slice of Mrs Weston's wedding-cake in their hands, but Mr Woodhouse would never believe it." (*Emma*, p.19). In contrast to Mr Woodhouse, who finds that his "own stomach could bear nothing rich" and "unwholesome to him," the local youngsters are less concerned about what they eat and are drawn to all manner of sweet treats.

British food and its cultural mores characterize Austen's writing, and in the Chinese translations of her novels, they are resisted, accepted, or transformed into food fusions. As mentioned in the above example, the notion of wedding cakes posed a challenge to Chinese translators over the past century. Table 3 shows the different translations of wedding cakes from the domesticated "喜餅" (xǐ bǐng) to the more cosmopolitan "結婚蛋糕" (jié hūn dàn gāo). In China, 喜 (happiness, joy) 餅 (pancake), is a round cake about 20 cm in diameter made of ingredients including flour, sesame seeds, and white sugar. It is normally decorated with a "喜喜" (double happiness pattern) and red silk. "喜餅" has been used as a wedding food for almost two thousand years, but the notion of using wedding cakes was relatively new to Chinese people. Here, the traditional British speciality is domesticated by adopting

Table 3. Translating “cakes” and “sandwiches” in *Emma*.

	cake	Wedding cake	sandwiches
T1:Liu, 1949	—(a)块(classifier) 饼子(pancake)	喜(happiness) 餅(pancake)	夹(double layers) 肉(meat) 面包(bread)
T2:Zhang, 1984	—(a)块(classifier) 甜(sweet) 饼(pancake)	结婚(wedding) 蛋糕(cake)	夹(double layers) 心(heart, middle) 面包(bread)
T3:Sun, Y., 1997	—(a)块(classifier) 饼(pancake)	喜(happiness) 餅(pancake)	夹(double layers) 肉(meat) 面包(bread)
T4:Li & Cai, 2005	—(a)块(classifier) 蛋(egg) 糕(cake)	结婚(wedding) 蛋糕(cake)	三(three) 明(wise) 治(control)
T5:Sun, Z., 2017	—(a)块(classifier) (sweet) 饼(pancake)	结婚(wedding) 蛋糕(cake)	三(three) 明(wise) 治(control)

covert translation when no readily available equivalent exists within local varieties of food. However, the introduction of Western wedding cakes into Chinese wedding ceremonies has brought a new concept into Chinese food culture and has led to neologisms including 結婚 (wedding) 蛋糕 (cake), according to Chinese Encyclopaedia, Baidu Baike.²

The translations of “sandwiches” also exemplify domestication evolving towards an approach characterized by a more cosmopolitan foreignization. In *Emma*, there is the line: “Mrs. Weston proposed having no regular supper; merely **sandwiches**” (p. 307). As can be seen from Table 3, “sandwiches” has been translated in ways ranging from 夾肉麵包 (jiá ròu miàn bāo) and 夾心麵包 (jiā xīn miàn bāo) to 三明治 (sān míng zhì). The translation of “sandwich” shows that translators working before the 21st century used a more domesticated Chinese food 夾肉餅/麵包 (bread with meat in the middle) or 夾心餅/麵包 (bread with something in the middle). Both Li and Cai (2005) and Sun (2017) use transliteration, i.e. the phonetic pronunciation of the original English term as transference in three Chinese characters ‘三(three)明(wise)治(control),’ which is similar to the English pronunciation and also has a positive connotation centring on wisdom, health, and firmness. These 21st century translation choices play a role in popularising British and Western food, creating transference across linguistic and cultural boundaries. Significantly, however, this reference to a somewhat ordinary light meal from a Western source text over 200 years old, consolidates a Chinese neologism denoting an interesting, non-domestic snack in the eyes of 21st century Chinese readerships. The translation examples above exemplify how the translations of food in literary texts contribute to a more cosmopolitan awareness of food, albeit via a direction of travel that is predominantly West to East, reflecting “the increasing asymmetries of cultural production and consumption in our unevenly globalised world” (Welsh 2017, 207).

Case study 3: variety in British meals: moving feasts from one point in time and space

‘What he said left a bad taste in my mouth. All this paper has in it are raw facts, half-baked ideas, and warmed-over theories. There are too many facts here for me to digest them all. I just can’t swallow that claim. That argument smells fishy. Let me stew over that for a while.’

(Lakoff and Johnson 1980, 58)

Here, Lakoff and Johnson show that food, food experiences, and the articulation of food consumption become conduits for our emotions and reactions, and they can subsequently encapsulate our worldviews. This is also the case in Austen's novels as the diversity between meals – as signifiers of different meanings and contexts – sometimes becomes a mechanism to move a plot forward. Scenes such as mealtimes often depict evolutions within characters by depicting their emotional state and their interactions, and such sequences lend momentum to the novels' marriage plots and love stories: "When Jane Austen describes meals, they are never innocent events" (Roberts 2003, 56). For example, in *Sense and Sensibility*, when Edward Ferrars marries another woman, Mrs Dashwood and the Dashwood sisters are depicted through their different reactions to food. "Marianne should eat nothing more. Mrs Dashwood's and Elinor's appetites were equally lost" (Austen 1811, 311). This narrative mechanism enables "the emotional tribulations of romantic love to take precedence over the need to eat but affiliates the interest in such love with adult consciousness" (Lee 2012, 369). A similar role is played by Christmas parties with "tressels and trays, bending under the weight of brawn and cold pies" in *Persuasion*, and "the ideal dinner" with "two full courses" that Mrs Bennet devises for Mr Bingley in *Pride and Prejudice*.

The variety of food depicted by Mr Elton in *Emma*, "he was only giving his fair companion an account of the yesterday's party at his friend Cole's" with "the Stilton cheese, the north Wiltshire, the butter, the celery, the beet-root and all the dessert" is again important for character development and is a comic device to show Emma's disappointment at Elton's greater interest in food than in her matchmaking. But the references to cheese are problematic for translators seeking to convey all the connotations of the source text into Chinese. There are over 700 different varieties of cheese produced in Britain and the population's love of cheese is evidenced in Austen's novels. However, this contrasts with the product's distribution in China. Although the earliest discovered preserved cheese was found in the Taklamakan Desert in Xinjiang and dates back to 1615 (Watson 2014), cheese is less popular compared to other types of food due to lactose intolerance issues. Today Stilton cheese is produced in the English counties of Leicestershire, Nottinghamshire, and Derbyshire, and its uniqueness was recognized by being granted protected designation of origin by the European Commission. However, in Austen's time, Stilton cheese was believed to be made in the village of Stilton in Huntingdonshire (Lane 1995).

As can be seen in Table 4, "Stilton" was replaced with different Chinese characters to transfer its pronunciation by using transliteration, from 斯(si)提(ti)爾(er)吞(tun), 威(wei)尔(er)特(te)郡(jun)的(de)斯(si)蒂(di)尔(er)顿(dun), to 斯(si)提(ti)尔(er)郡(jun). However, "North Wiltshire Stilton cheese" by Zhang in 1984 is an obvious mistake. For North Wiltshire cheese, another geographically specific British cheese, many translators tried to use a combination of phonetic and semantic translation methods to translate this term, ranging from 北(North) 温爾特(wen er te)郡(county) 乾(dry)酪(cheese), 北(North) 威(wei)尔(er)郡(county) 干(dry)酪(cheese) to 北(North) 威(wei)尔(er)特(te)乳(milk)酪(cheese). The translation examples of Stilton and North Wiltshire show that the translators, in this case, have tried to preserve some of the characteristics of the cheese (such as its texture), while transliteration at least conveys something of the original place name. Some geographical specificity, however, is inevitably lost, compared with what readers of the English source text would have understood. This lack of geographical specificity (even to Britain) is perhaps an issue requiring

Table 4. Translation of “Stilton and North Wiltshire cheese” in Emma.

	Stilton cheese	North Wiltshire cheese
T1:Liu 1949	斯提爾頓(sī tí ěr tún) 乾(dry)酪(cheese)	北(North) 溫爾特(wēn ěr tè)郡(county)乾(dry)酪(cheese)
T2:Zhang 1984	威爾特(wēi ěr tè) 郡(county)的(of)斯蒂爾頓(sī tí ěr tún) 干(dry)酪(cheese)	
T3:Sun, Y. 1997	斯提爾(sī tí ěr) 郡(county)的(of)干(dry)酪(cheese)	北(North)威爾(wēi ěr)郡(county)干(dry)酪(cheese)
T4:Li & Cai, 2005	斯蒂爾頓(sī tí ěr dùn)干(dry)酪(cheese)	北(North)威爾特(wēi ěr tè)郡(county)干(dry)酪(cheese)
T5:Sun, Z. 2017	斯蒂爾頓(sī tí ěr dùn)干(dry)酪(cheese)	北(North)威爾特(wēi ěr tè)乳(milk)酪(cheese)

Table 5. Translations of “brawn and cold pies” in Persuasion marked in bold.

T1: Sun and Tang, 1984	Chinese translation	屋子(room)的(of)另(another)一边(side)支着儿(stand)张(clarifier)搁架(shelf), 搁架(shelf)上(on)摆着(display)盘子(plates), 盘子(plates)里(in)盛着(hold)腌(salted)猪肉(pork)和(and)冷(cold)馅饼(savoury pancakes), 把(sentence maker)搁架(shelf)都(all)压(press)弯(bend)了。
	Back translation	On the other side of the room stands a shelf, On the shelf it displays salted pork and cold savoury pancakes on the plates. It is so heavy that the shelf is all bend.
T2: Qiu, 1991	Chinese translation	房间的(room)另(another)一头(side)摆着(display)给(sentence maker)褐色的(brown)冷(cold)馅饼(savoury pancakes)压(press)弯了(bend)的支架(shelf)和(and)托盘(plates).
	Back translation	Another side of the room displays brown cold savoury pancakes, which bend the shelf and the plates.
T3: Su, 2009	Chinese translation	屋子(room)的另(another)一边(side)支着(hold)几张(several)搁架(shelves), 搁架(shelf)上(on)摆(display)满了(full)盘子(plates), 盘子(plates)里(in)盛着(hold)过(celebrate)圣诞节(Christmas)的各种(a variety of)糕点(cakes)和(and)别的(other)食物(food), 把(sentence maker)搁架(shelf)都(all)压(press)弯了(bend)。
	Back translation	On another side of the room stands several shelves full of plates filled with various Christmas cakes and other food that make the shelf bend.
T4: Ding, 2014	Chinese translation	另一头(another side)立着(stand)几个(a few)架子(shelves), 架上(shelf)摆(display)满了(full)盘子(plates), 里头(in)盛着(hold)猪肉(pork)和冷(cold)馅饼(savoury pancakes), 把(sentence maker)架子(shelf)都(all)压(press)弯(bend)了。
	Back translation	On another side stands several shelves; the shelves are full of plates filled with pork and cold savoury pancakes that make the shelf bend.

a separate investigation; for example, we noted that some translators translated “parsnip” as “美國防風” (“American Parsnip”) (Sun 1997). Clearly, this indicates that not all Chinese readers, or even translators themselves, are aware that Jane Austen’s stories are based in Britain.

Christmas is mentioned six times in *Persuasion*. Unlike today’s turkey dishes, early 19th century English Christmas dinner parties were described as places where there were “brawn and cold pies, where riotous boys were holding high revel; the whole was completed by a roaring Christmas fire” (p. 470). Brawn, also known as headcheese, is a cold cut terrine or meat jelly made from a pig’s head and bones, spiced, boiled, and set to cool in moulds (Beeton 1984). This is similar to the Chinese dish 齏肉 (yáo ròu). The translations of the Christmas meal “brawn” in Table 5 indicate that none of the translators provided the correct translation of this traditional British dish. T1 uses “salted pork,” T4 “pork;” T2 mistranslated it as “褐色的” “the color brown;” T3 did not translate “brawn and cold pie” but provides a generic explanation of the term as “a variety of Christmas cakes and other food” (過耶誕

節的各種糕點和別的食物)。Rather like “mince pie,” references to Georgian Christmas “Cold pies” create another challenge for Chinese translators. T1 and T4 use the domesticated Chinese food “cold savoury pancakes” (冷餡餅)。The mistranslations of “brawn and cold pie” indicate that the Chinese translators may not have consulted an English native speaker or carried out sufficient research on this traditional Christmas dish.

A functional linguistic TQA approach to assess Austen’s food translation

In this section, we discuss the rationale for choosing House’s TQA as our theoretical framework to evaluate how the diverse types of food-related references elucidated from the corpora have been translated into Chinese over time.

The integration of TQA and corpus-based methods is mutually beneficial. House’s Translation Quality Assessment, as a method of assessing translation quality at various levels, is one of several pioneering studies that aimed to evaluate translation quality and it has become influential in the field of translation studies. Today, House’s “covert-overt translation typology” as a functional linguistic TQA is beneficial both for translation practice and translation evaluation practice due to its “flexibility” and “explanatory power” (Hatim 1998, 99). The choice of overt and covert translation, according to House (1997, 2015), “depends not just on the translation itself, or on the text or the translator’s personal interpretation of the text, but also, and to a considerable extent, on the reasons for translation, on the implied readers, on publishing and marketing policies” (p.118). This is because translation is not only a linguistic activity but also a socio-cultural phenomenon, and this is particularly evident in translating food and food sequences in Jane Austen’s novels.

For the past twenty years, the number of publications that have incorporated House’s TQA, especially her dichotomous “overt” and “covert” division, has grown quickly in Chinese contexts (Si 2005; Li 2020). Arguably, House’s TQA is particularly well suited for highlighting the strengths and weaknesses of transferring meaning from Western to Chinese cultural contexts, and it is therefore deployed in this research. An overt translation strategy aims to preserve features of a source culture and retain information from the source texts in the translation texts so that “the original is tied in a specific manner to the source language community and its culture and is often specifically directed at source culture addressees but at the same time points beyond the source language community” (House 2015, 54). By contrast, covert translation refers to how the source text matches the translation texts in terms of function. The covert translation is normally “pragmatically of equal concern for source and target language;” thus, it is not “particularly tied to the source language and culture” but has “been created in its own right” (House 2015, 56). To complete a task of covert translation, House further argues that a translator should firstly identify the functional equivalence between the source and target texts, and, only in this way, will the messages presented to the target readers be consistent with those received by the readers of the original. Therefore, the entire translation process involves rephrasing the embedded information of the source text in its corresponding target text since the source language and the target language often belong to different social and cultural contexts. The following sections employ House’s overt and covert TQA approach to assess the translations of Austen’s food references within the case studies.

Assessing the translations of Austen's food references: challenges in representing 19th century British food in Chinese

Covert translation: reconceptualising British food in transit

House (2015) argues that translators must make allowances for “underlying cultural differences” and conceal “anything that betrays the foreignness of a source text” (p. 57). In Case Study 1, the translation of “mince pie” shows that different translators have all tried to use covert translation to provide a functional equivalent by domesticating traditional British food with local Chinese food. The six different translations implicate different degrees of (mis)match with the original British food: T4 uses “mince pies/pancakes” (肉末餡餅), which is functionally closest to the original British “mince pie.” T3 and T5 use “meat pies” (肉餅), which is also linked to the British “mince pie” as early forms of it included minced meat. Then there is T6, “pastry with fillings” (餡餅), which can potentially be any fillings, such as minced meat, fruit, or vegetables. T1 pork steak (豬排) and T2 steamed buns (細饅首) are mistranslations.

In Case Study 2, “Wedding cakes” were domesticated in T1 and T3 as covert translations before the 1990s by referring to a Chinese wedding cake喜(happiness)餅(pancake/pie) which stands for “happiness and get-together.” “Sandwiches” is another such example; Chinese translators in T1, T2, and T3 domesticated the term with a similar Chinese food as 夾(double layers)肉(meat)麵包(bread), so the original expressions in the source text are replaced by cultural equivalents in the target language before the 1990s. In Case Study 3, “brawn and cold pies,” the two traditional British Christmas foods, were also a major challenge for the translators, and many mistranslations have been noted. “Brawn” can be seen in Table 4; Qiu’s translation in T2 mistranslated “Brawn” as the colour brown. T1 translated it as salted pork (腌猪肉). Su’s translation in T3 described “a variety of Christmas cakes and other food” to substitute brawn and cold pies. T4 translated it as pork. As for “Cold pies,” the term was domesticated with a similar Chinese dish; T1, T2, and T4 use references to Chinese cold pies “冷餡餅.” This example indicates that different translators have produced the translated text by reconceptualising British food as Chinese food. In the overall context of translating the diversity of food and food scenes in Austen’s works into Chinese, this is an appropriate strategy if the translators intended to establish a connection between food scenes from 200 years ago and the present day, and between Chinese and English. Thus, it is not surprising that traditional British dishes in Austen’s era are domesticated across languages by using covert translation when no suitable equivalent exists to convey the local and chronological specificity of Austen’s food references. The covert translation in this context is no longer simply a linguistic operation that consists in transferring meaning from one language to another. It is “an operation of thought through which we must translate ourselves into the thought of the other language, the forgotten thinking of the other language. We must translate ourselves into it and not make it come into our language. It is necessary to go toward the unthought thinking of the other language” (Derrida 1982/1985, 115). Covert translation has transformed and adapted British food from Austen’s era with a view to addressing Chinese audiences and creating a resonance with local palates.

Overt translation: selective appropriation in food scenes

Overt translation reveals itself as a translation. House (1997) argues that an overt translation should preserve the original features for readers and should be “tied to a specific occasion in which a precisely specified source language audience is/was being addressed” (p.66), which means that an overt translation leaves “traces” of the source texts. By the time Chinese translators began to translate Austen more frequently, from the 1980s onwards, China had opened up its economy. Therefore, translators were translating food references against a backdrop of a booming economy that had become more receptive to the novelty of Western culture and its traditions – especially if there were commercial benefits to be enjoyed by appropriating certain traditions. As regards “Wedding cakes” in Case Study 2 above, T2, T4, and T5 use overt translation by introducing the notion of Western wedding cakes, 結婚(wedding)蛋糕(cake), through a changed linguistic expression. Similar translation methods were used for translating sandwiches. The modern translators in T4 and T5 used transliteration via three Chinese characters with positive connotations, 三(three)明(wise)治(control), to indicate that the food has been prepared judiciously, with three layers.

A tendency towards covert translation can therefore be noted among the 20th century translations, but with the consequence that the source text term loses its specificity. A greater sense of global awareness characterizes several of the 21st century translations, with the notion of “cake” (as understood in Western contexts, and, increasingly, by Chinese consumers) and “sandwich” being referenced. This reinforces the idea that translators do not necessarily use their own target culture equivalents to interpret source culture in their translated texts, but may prefer to extend source culture information so that readers feel that they are “travelling abroad” when they read a translated work. Decades ago, it would have been unimaginable that cakes and sandwiches might become a popular food in China today, but many initiatives, from translations of Western literature to imported television series, have added impetus to a process of cultural discovery.

Li (2020) suggests that covert translation “helps stimulate young readers’ interest in reading’ and disseminate more published works abroad in the context of Chinese-to-English translation (p. 74). However, there is not always a clear division between overt and covert translations, as many translators use both methods. Case Study 3, the translation of Stilton, exemplifies this by using both overt translation (transfer of the pronunciation of Stilton to Chinese characters) and covert (it is translated as “乾酪,” an existing Chinese term for cheese). From the 21st century onwards, the translators use a more consistent 斯(sī)蒂(dì)爾(ěr)頓(dùn), plus existing Chinese terminology for cheese 乾(gān)酪(lào), which means dried cheese. “North Wiltshire cheese” is another such example. Some translators translated “north” with Chinese semantic correspondence “北” plus the phonetic transfer of “Wilt” to “wēi ěr,” 威爾, “shire” as “郡” (county) with a similar Chinese correspondence + 乾酪 (Chinese cheese). Zhang’s 1984 translation of “North Wiltshire’s Stilton cheese” is a mistranslation. The evaluation here shows that it is not easy to distinguish a covert version from an overt translation since the analytical dimensions may only change to cater for the cultural norms of the target language. As a result, the dividing line becomes blurred and may be conditioned by the purpose of the translation.

Conclusion

“The food plot” in Austen’s works reveals character motivation, clarifies relationships, or sheds light on characters to bring them together, revealing aspects of their nature and their moral fibre (Reay 2018). This study shows that while the translated works of Jane Austen give Chinese readerships a glimpse into the prevalent socio-cultural mores in Britain 200 years ago, the translated food scenes also depict more novel, intriguing elements that have a more contemporary feel to a readership that had only relatively recently started to engage with Western food and foodways. In this context, translators have helped to make Jane Austen and her convivial food scenes timeless.

This study indicates that different strategies have been used by translators to connect the concepts of food culture and society in Austen’s era to contemporary Chinese culture. However, this study also shows that many terminological inconsistencies and examples of translation loss/mistranslation have recurred in Chinese translations of Austen. Cross-cultural collaboration between scholars and translators is the most effective way of ensuring clarity and mutual understanding in all fields, ranging from politics and economics to culture and translation. China’s academic and cultural isolationism for long periods of the 20th century arguably contributed to the evident weaknesses that are visible in the translations of Austen’s works that date from this period, the translators having few possibilities to verify certain hypotheses. Several 20th century translations also have discernible intertextualities, for example, the translated version of *Emma* by Sun (1997) displays numerous similarities in food terminology when compared with Liu’s translation (1949); the question of “hereditary” influence on successive 20th century translations of Austen’s work is arguably something that requires further academic analysis.

By integrating a corpus-based approach with House’s TQA, this study finds that both covert and overt translation strategies have been used to translate food and food references in Austen’s era. The reworkings used in the 21st century translations convey British food traditions (some of which are still relevant) to create an experience that simultaneously evokes another country’s past but which – by referencing phenomena such as wedding cakes – also reflects emerging, modern cultural realities in China, and exemplifies the phenomenon of the globalization of local traditions. This study has limited itself to evaluating the specific theme of food and food-based scenarios within Austen’s novels by using House’s covert-overt TQA approach. Further research to systematically evaluate other themes within the existing translation works (or indeed the accuracy of entire translations of specific novels), by using other TQA approaches or by using House’s TQA approach in contexts using register, field, and tone would also be informative in determining how translators can most effectively bridge the temporal distance and cultural space between original texts and translations.

Notes

1. <https://cnki.net/>.
2. <https://baike.baidu.com/>.

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