

Essay V | Cultural Translation Without Dilution: Food Edition

第五篇 | 不稀释的美食文化转译：如何让古老的智慧在现代厨房中存活

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Abstract

This essay addresses the challenge of transmitting Chinese food wisdom to modern kitchens without losing its essence. It argues that pursuing authenticity often becomes a barrier, reducing living traditions to rigid rules and exotic ingredients. Instead, it proposes translation with attention: carrying forward the questions—what is in season? what tastes are present? how does this food feel in the body?—rather than fixed answers. Adaptation without dilution preserves relational intelligence while allowing form to change. Every cook becomes a translator, engaging tradition by asking its questions anew. Cultural translation is thus a practice of maintaining dialogue, not merely preserving form.

摘要

本文探讨了将中国饮食智慧传递到现代厨房而不失去精髓的挑战。文章指出，对正宗的追求常成为障碍，将活着的传统简化为僵化的规则和异国食材。文章提出“带着注意力的转译”：传递问题——当季什么？有哪些味道？这食物在身体里感觉如何？——而非固定答案。在形式可变的情况下，保留关系智慧。每位厨师都是译者，通过重新提出问题来与传统互动。文化转译因此是一种保持对话的练习，而不仅是保存形式。

Introduction

引言

A London kitchen, Tuesday evening, 7:45 p.m. A young woman stands at the stove, phone propped against the salt pig, a recipe video playing. She's making stir-fry for the first time. The recipe calls for Chinese broccoli — she has regular broccoli. It calls for a wok — she has a non-stick pan. It calls for Shaoxing wine — she uses dry sherry. She hesitates. Is this still Chinese food? Does it matter?

一个伦敦厨房，周二晚上七点四十五分。一个年轻女人站在灶台前，手机靠在盐罐上，播放着一个食谱视频。她第一次做炒菜。食谱要求用芥蓝——她只有普通西兰花。要求用炒锅——她有不粘锅。要求用绍兴酒——她用干雪莉酒代替。她犹豫了。这还是中餐吗？这重要吗？

The answer matters less than the question. Because every culture that travels must translate. Every practice that moves from one context to another must adapt. The real question is not whether adaptation happens — it always does — but whether something essential is lost in the process.

答案不如问题重要。因为每一种传播的文化都必须转译。每一种从一个语境迁移到另一个语境的实践都必须适应。真正的问题不是适应是否发生——它总是发生——而是在这个过程中是否有某种本质的东西丢失了。

This is the challenge of **cultural translation without dilution**: how to share the deep intelligence of **Chinese food philosophy** — its attention to season, to balance, to the felt experience of eating — in ways that are accessible to modern cooks, without reducing it to a list of exotic ingredients or rigid rules.

这就是**不稀释的文化转译**的挑战：如何分享**中华饮食哲学**的深层智慧——它对季节的关注，对平衡的关注，对被感知的饮食体验的关注——以一种现代厨师能够触及的方式，而不将其简化为异国情调的食材清单或僵化的规则。

When you cook this week, you are not just making a meal. You are participating in a living tradition — one that has survived for centuries precisely because it knows how to adapt without losing itself.

当你这周烹饪时，你不仅仅是在做一餐饭。你是在参与一个活着的传统——一个恰恰因为它知道如何适应而不失去自身，所以存活了数个世纪的传统。

Section I | The Problem with "Authenticity"

第一节 | “正宗”的问题

In food media, "authenticity" is often used as a weapon. This dish is authentic. That dish is not. This restaurant is run by someone from the region. That one has been Westernized. The implication is clear: authenticity is good; deviation is loss.

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在食物媒体中，“正宗”常常被用作武器。这道菜是正宗的。那道菜不是。这家餐厅由来自该地区的人经营。那家已经被西化了。暗示很清楚：正宗是好的；偏离是损失。

But this framing misunderstands how culinary traditions actually live. Every cuisine that has survived has done so by adapting. The tomatoes in Italian cooking came from the Americas. The chilies in Sichuan cuisine arrived from the New World. “Authentic” Chinese food, if traced back far enough, is a tapestry of borrowings, substitutions, and creative adaptations.

但这种框架误解了烹饪传统实际上是如何存活的。每一种存活下来的菜系都是通过适应做到的。意大利烹饪中的番茄来自美洲。川菜中的辣椒来自新大陆。如果追溯得足够远，“正宗”的中餐是一幅借用、替代和创造性适应的织锦。

The problem is not adaptation. The problem is **dilution** — when the core intelligence of a tradition is lost, leaving only a surface-level imitation.

问题不在于适应。问题在于**稀释**——当传统的核心智慧丢失，只留下表面层次的模仿时。

Notice the difference:

注意区别：

A cook who substitutes local vegetables for Chinese ones, but still pays attention to seasonal appropriateness, to taste balance, to the felt experience of the meal — this is adaptation without dilution. She might use broccoli instead of gai lan, but she asks: is this broccoli in season? Does its mild bitterness balance the other flavors? How does this meal land in my body tonight?

一个用本地蔬菜替代中国蔬菜，但仍然关注季节适宜性、味道平衡、餐食的被感知体验的厨师——这是不稀释的适应。她可能用西兰花代替芥蓝，但她会问：这西兰花当季吗？它温和的苦味能平衡其他味道吗？今晚这餐饭在我身体里感觉如何？

A cook who follows a recipe mechanically, using imported ingredients, but has no sense of why the dish is constructed the way it is, no awareness of how it lands in the body — this is dilution, regardless of how “authentic” the ingredients are.

一个机械地遵循食谱、使用进口食材，但对菜肴为何如此构成没有感觉、对它在身体里如何落地没有觉察的厨师——这是稀释，无论食材多么“正宗”。

Chinese food philosophy is not a set of recipes. It is a set of questions: What is in season? What tastes are present? How does this food feel in the body? When those questions survive the translation, the tradition survives.

中华饮食哲学不是一套食谱。它是一套问题：什么当季？有什么味道？这种食物在身体里感觉如何？当这些问题在转译中存活下来，传统就存活下来。

Section II | What Travels — The Core of Chinese Food Philosophy

第二节 | 什么在传播——中华饮食哲学的核心

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If you are a cook in a Western kitchen, with Western ingredients and Western equipment, what can you carry with you from **Chinese food philosophy**? What is light enough to travel, yet essential enough to matter?

如果你是一个在西方厨房里的厨师，使用西方的食材和西方的设备，你能从**中华饮食哲学**中携带什么？什么是轻到可以传播，却又重要到不可或缺？

Here are three principles that travel well — because they are not about ingredients, but about attention.

这里有三个传播得很好的原则——因为它们不是关于食材，而是关于注意力。

1. Seasonal intelligence

You don't need a Chinese calendar to eat with the seasons. You just need to notice what's growing near you. When you cook this week, try this small shift: before you choose what to make, look at what's fresh at the market. Let the season guide you, not just the recipe. A winter carrot tastes different from a summer one. Pay attention to that difference.

1. 季节智慧

你不需要中国农历来与季节共食。你只需要注意你附近在生长什么。当你这周烹饪时，试试这个小小的转变：在你选择做什么之前，看看市场上什么新鲜。让季节引导你，而不仅仅是食谱。冬天的胡萝卜和夏天的胡萝卜味道不同。注意那种差异。

2. Taste balance

You don't need five specific ingredients to balance the five tastes. You just need to ask: in this meal, what tastes are present? Is there something sour to wake up the digestion? Something bitter to balance the sweet? This is not a rule to follow — it's a question to cook with. Like tuning an instrument by ear, you learn to adjust by feel.

2. 味道平衡

你不需要五种特定的食材来平衡五味。你只需要问：在这餐饭里，有什么味道？有没有酸的东西来唤醒消化？有没有苦的东西来平衡甜？这不是一个要遵循的规则——这是一个要带着烹饪的问题。就像凭耳朵调音一样，你学会凭感觉调整。

3. Felt experience

You don't need to master Chinese cooking techniques to pay attention to how food lands in the body. After you eat, pause for a moment. Notice: do you feel light or heavy? Energized or sluggish? Satisfied or still hungry? This is the most portable wisdom of all — because it requires nothing but your own awareness. A child who takes a bite and says "this is sour" is already practicing it.

3. 被感知的体验

你不需要掌握中国烹饪技术来注意食物在身体里如何落地。吃完后，暂停片刻。注意：你感觉轻盈还是沉重？充满活力还是昏沉？满足还是仍然饿？这是最可携带的智慧——因为它不需要任何东西，只你自己的

觉察。一个孩子咬了一口说“这个酸酸的”，已经在练习它了。

Try this small shift this week: after one meal — just one — sit for thirty seconds and notice how your body feels. No judgment. Just curiosity. This is **Chinese food philosophy** in its most portable form.

这周试试这个小小的转变：在一餐饭后——就一餐——坐三十秒，注意你的身体感觉如何。没有评判。只有好奇。这是最可携带形式的**中华饮食哲学**。

Section III | What Gets Lost — And Why It Matters

第三节 | 什么会丢失——以及为什么它很重要

When culinary traditions travel, something always gets lost. The question is: what are we willing to lose, and what must we fight to keep?

当烹饪传统传播时，总会有东西丢失。问题是：我们愿意失去什么，我们必须努力保留什么？

What often gets lost in the translation of Chinese food to Western contexts is the **relational intelligence** — the sense that a meal is not an isolated event, but part of a larger whole: the season, the other dishes, the bodies at the table.

在中餐向西语境的转译中，常常丢失的是**关系智慧**——那种一餐饭不是一个孤立的事件，而是一个更大整体的一部分的感觉：季节、其他菜肴、餐桌上的身体。

Picture this: a Western cook masters the flavors of mapo tofu. The Sichuan peppercorns tingle, the chili oil glows, the fermented bean paste deepens. She serves it alone, with rice, as a complete meal. It's delicious. But in a traditional context, this dish would never stand alone. It would be one among several — each balancing the others. The numbing heat of the tofu would be tempered by a cooling cucumber salad. The richness would be cut by a simple broth. The translation is technically accurate, but the relational intelligence is gone.

想象这个场景：一个西方厨师完美掌握了麻婆豆腐的味道。花椒麻香，辣椒油红亮，豆瓣酱深沉。她单独上桌，配米饭，作为完整的一餐。很美味。但在传统语境中，这道菜从不单独出现。它会是几道菜中的一道——每道都平衡其他。豆腐的麻辣会被凉爽的拍黄瓜调和。浓郁会被清汤冲淡。转译在技术上是准确的，但关系智慧消失了。

This is not a failure of the cook. It is the natural result of translating a relational practice into a culture that thinks in terms of individual dishes, individual meals, individual eaters.

这不是厨师的失败。这是将一个关系性的实践转译到一个以个体菜肴、个体餐食、个体食客为思考方式的文化中的自然结果。

So what can we do? We can't change the culture. But we can, in our own kitchens, restore a small piece of that intelligence.

那么我们能做什么？我们不能改变文化。但我们可以在自己的厨房里，恢复一小块那种智慧。

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When you cook this week, try this: if you're making one dish, ask yourself — what's missing? Not in terms of nutrition, but in terms of experience. Would a small side of something sour balance the richness? Would a simple soup add a sense of completion? You don't need a full Chinese banquet. Just a moment of relational thinking.

当你这周烹饪时，试试这个：如果你在做一道菜，问自己——缺少什么？不是从营养角度，而是从体验角度。一小份酸的东西会平衡浓郁吗？一个简单的汤会增加一种完成感吗？你不需要一整桌中式宴席。只是一个片刻的关系性思考。

Section IV | A Practice for the Week: Cooking with One Question

第四节 | 本周的一个练习：带着一个问题烹饪

Here is a simple practice for anyone who wants to participate in **cultural translation without dilution** — whether you're cooking your first stir-fry or your hundredth.

这里有一个简单的练习，适合任何想要参与**不稀释的文化转译**的人——无论你是在做你的第一次炒菜还是第一百次。

This week, choose one meal — just one — and cook with this question:

本周，选择一餐饭——就一餐——带着这个问题烹饪：

What does this food need — right now, in this moment, for this body — to feel complete?

这食物需要什么——就在此刻，为这个身体——才能感觉完整？

Not "What does the recipe say?" Not "What would make this authentic?" Just: what does it need?

不是“食谱说什么？”不是“什么会让它正宗？”只是：它需要什么？

Maybe it needs more salt. Maybe it needs something sour. Maybe it needs to be eaten more slowly. Maybe it needs to be shared. Maybe it needs nothing at all — it's already complete.

也许它需要更多盐。也许它需要一些酸的东西。也许它需要被更慢地吃。也许它需要被分享。也许它什么都不需要——它已经完整了。

This question is a small door into **Chinese food philosophy**. It shifts your attention from following rules to sensing relationship. It asks you to trust your own perception, not just an external authority. And it works with any ingredient, any cuisine, any kitchen.

这个问题是一扇小小的门，通向**中华饮食哲学**。它把你的注意力从遵循规则转移到感知关系。它要求你信任自己的感知，而不仅仅是外部的权威。而且它适用于任何食材、任何菜系、任何厨房。

Try it. One meal. One question. Notice what happens.

试试看。一餐饭。一个问题。注意发生了什么。

Section V | When the Cook Becomes the Translator

第五节 | 当厨师成为译者

Here is the deeper truth: every cook who engages with a tradition from another culture becomes a translator. And like any translator, you face a choice.

这里有更深层的真相：每一个与来自另一种文化的传统产生连接的厨师，都成为一个译者。像任何译者一样，你面临一个选择。

You can translate literally — word for word, ingredient for ingredient — and risk losing the meaning. You can translate freely — capturing the spirit, even if the letter changes — and risk losing the connection to the source.

你可以逐字翻译——词对词，食材对食材——冒着失去意义的风险。你可以自由翻译——捕捉精神，即使文字改变——冒着失去与源头连接的风险。

Chinese food philosophy offers a third way: translate with attention. Not literal, not free — but relational. You stay connected to the source not by copying it, but by understanding the questions it was answering. Then you ask those same questions in your own context, with your own ingredients, your own body, your own life.

中华饮食哲学提供了第三条路：带着注意力翻译。不是逐字，不是自由——而是关系性的。你与源头保持连接，不是通过复制它，而是通过理解它当时在回答的问题。然后你在自己的语境中，用你自己的食材、你自己的身体、你自己的生命，问同样的问题。

Think of it like learning to sing a song from another culture. You can imitate the sounds — this is literal translation. You can change the melody entirely — this is free translation. Or you can learn the emotional arc of the song, the story it tells, the feeling it carries — and then sing it in your own voice, with your own heart. The words may change. The feeling remains.

想象一下学习唱一首来自另一种文化的歌。你可以模仿声音——这是逐字翻译。你可以完全改变旋律——这是自由翻译。或者你可以学习这首歌的情感脉络，它讲述的故事，它承载的感受——然后用你自己的声音，你自己的心去唱。歌词可能改变。感受留存。

That is translation with attention. That is how traditions stay alive.

这就是带着注意力的翻译。这就是传统存活的方式。

When you cook this week, you are not just making food. You are continuing a conversation that has been going on for thousands of years. The ingredients may be different. The equipment may be different. But the questions are the same: What does this body need? What does this season ask? How can this meal help us feel more alive?

当你这周烹饪时，你不仅仅是在做食物。你是在继续一个已经进行了数千年的对话。食材可能不同。设备可能不同。但问题是一样的：这个身体需要什么？这个季节要求什么？这餐饭如何帮助我们感觉更活着？

That is cultural **translation without dilution**. Not preserving the form, but transmitting the

intelligence.

这就是**不稀释的文化转译**。不是保存形式，而是传递智慧。

Conclusion | Not a Recipe, But a Relationship

结语 | 不是食谱，而是一个关系

In the end, **Chinese food philosophy** is not a set of recipes to be exported. It is a relationship to be entered — a relationship with food, with body, with the world.

最终，**中华饮食哲学**不是一套要出口的食谱。它是一个要进入的关系——与食物的关系，与身体的关系，与世界的关系。

When that relationship survives the translation, the tradition survives. When it is lost, even the most authentic ingredients cannot restore it.

当那个关系在转译中存活下来，传统就存活下来。当它丢失时，即使最正宗的食材也无法恢复它。

So when you cook this week, don't worry about authenticity. Worry about attention. Don't worry about getting it right. Worry about feeling it fully. Don't worry about whether this is "real" Chinese food. Worry about whether this meal helps you — and anyone you share it with — feel more alive, more connected, more present.

所以当你这周烹饪时，不要担心正宗。担心注意力。不要担心做得对。担心全然感受它。不要担心这是否是“真正”的中餐。担心这餐饭是否能帮助你——以及任何你与之分享的人——感觉更活着、更连接、更临在。

A child takes a bite and says: this is sour. A cook in London adds a squeeze of lemon and tastes again. A parent asks: what do you notice? These small moments are not deviations from tradition. They are tradition, alive and breathing, in a new kitchen, in a new time.

一个孩子咬了一口说：这个酸酸的。一个在伦敦的厨师挤了一点柠檬汁，再尝一次。一个父母问：你注意到了什么？这些微小的时刻不是对传统的偏离。它们是传统本身，活着的，呼吸着的，在一个新的厨房里，在一个新的时代。

Cultural translation without dilution is not about preserving the past. It is about keeping the questions alive — so that anyone, in any kitchen, can discover their own answers.

不稀释的文化转译不是关于保存过去。它是关于让问题活着——这样任何人，在任何厨房里，都可以发现他们自己的答案。

When you cook this week, you are not just a cook. You are a translator. And the tradition you are translating — the living intelligence of **Chinese food philosophy** — is in your hands.

当你这周烹饪时，你不只是一个厨师。你是一个译者。而你在翻译的传统——**中华饮食哲学**的活着的智慧——就在你手中。