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## THE ROLE OF METONYMY IN CULINARY DESIGNATION CONSTRUCTIONS (A Case Study of Dish Names in Sichuan Cuisine)

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### Abstract

Existing studies on Chinese dish names have mainly focused on their translation strategies, cultural connotations, and pragmatic functions, while comparatively little attention has been paid to the cognitive mechanisms underlying the dish-name formation, such as metaphor and metonymy. Hence, the present study addresses this gap by examining dish names in Sichuan cuisine, one of China's eight major culinary traditions, from the perspective of their fundamentally metonymic nature, based on a corpus drawn from TSTCTD. Focusing on two major constructional types, i.e., endocentric and exocentric constructions, it analyzes the metonymic cognitive mechanisms that motivate dish-naming practices, and classifies the typical metonymic patterns attested in the data. This study identifies eleven metonymic naming patterns as flavor typical for mixtures of flavors, material for product, property for ingredient, place for flavor, producer for product, color typical of a state for the state, manner of action for the result of the action, container for the contained, material for flavor, local celebrity for product and cultural icon for product. These patterns demonstrate that the vehicles in Chinese dish-designation metonymy is predominantly grounded in concrete, experientially salient domains as well as in culturally specific, uniquely Chinese cognitive bases, often instantiated through historical allusions. This metonymic naming pattern reveals the philosophical paradigm of concrete, immanent thinking in Chinese philosophy.

**Keywords:** *Dish names; metonymy; endocentric; exocentric; TSTCTD*

### 1. Introduction

Food occupies a central place in everyday life, as an old Chinese saying goes, “mín yǐ shí wéi tiān” (Lit. People regard eating as the sky) – Food is the primary need of the people. Chinese cuisine, represented by its eight major regional traditions, is widely renowned for its remarkable diversity of dish

types and a wide range of flavors. As a kind of informational texts used in real communicative practice, Chinese dish names are not only referential labels for food items but also culturally saturated semiotic representations that encode culture-specific cognitive mechanisms. Through their condensed linguistic forms, dish names reflect how sensory,

perceptual and cultural knowledge is selectively profiled (Langacker, 1987) in Chinese conceptualization.

Existing studies on Chinese dish names have been conducted mainly within the field of translation studies, culture studies, and aesthetic studies, with particular attention to grammatical structures (Song, 2022), translation strategies (Zhu, 2008), cultural connotations (Wei, 2020), and pragmatic functions (Huang, 2019). While these researches have yielded valuable insights, they have paid comparatively little attention to the cognitive mechanisms underlying the formation of dish names, such as metaphor and metonymy. Within the limited number of studies regarding cognitive mechanisms, particular attention has been paid to the metaphorical mechanism of dish names featuring culturally salient imagery (e.g. Y. Zhang, 2014; Herliana, et al, 2025). However, these studies have selectively analyzed a limited number of emblematic dish names, failing to offer a systematic account of the underlying cognitive mechanisms. By comparison with metaphor studies, research addressing metonymy in dish names is far more scarce. A search of the China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI) database reveals only four studies that directly engage with metonymic phenomena in dish naming, i.e. Meng, 2017; Wang, 2017; Tang&Gu, 2017; Huang, 2019. As a result, the theoretical reach and explanatory depth of metonymy in dish-naming research remain limited, calling for further investigation into its underexplored dimensions.

Dish names, from the perspective of cognitive linguistics, are conventionalized linguistic constructions that primarily function to refer to a specific culinary entities. The conceptualization of a dish encompasses multiple dimensions, including its core and supporting ingredients, perceptual properties (including visual form such as shape and color, olfactory qualities and gustatory taste), cooking methods, serving vessels, producer and origin (geographical and historical). In some cases, dish naming may also evoke other conceptual elements, such as the diner, consumption effects, or cultural associations, etc. Given constraints of cognitive economy (As early as the late nineteenth century, the French phonologist Parys proposed the economy principle (principe

d'économie) in language change, particularly the phonological evolution. Subsequently, the French linguist André Martinet developed a more systematic hypothesis of the principle of economy in language use, arguing that language change is driven by a balance between communicative requirements and natural human inertia) and the requirements of effective communication, it is impossible to convey the full set of dimensions simultaneously. Instead, dish names selectively highlight a subset of above-mentioned aspects, a process that constitutes profiling and metonymy.

The cognitive elements conventionally profiled in dish names of Sichuan cuisine can be roughly categorized into two types: i. internal constraints, which correspond to the most salient and memorable features of a dish in human perception; ii. external constraints, which emphasize partial attributes of a dish for the sake of commercial promotion or aesthetic appreciation.

Human perception, information organization and linguistic expression generally follow principles of similarity, proximity, sequence, and profiling, where proximity and profiling serving as the primary psychological basis for metonymic cognition. In addition, as Meng (2017) observes, Chinese dish names reflect the specific characteristic of Han-ethnicity cognition, that is, concrete, image-based thinking pattern and emphasis on the representational imagery. Analogous to hieroglyphs in Chinese writing system, Chinese dish names often function as visual or symbolic representations akin to traditional Chinese paintings. Western dish names tend to be more literal, merely conveying information about ingredients, seasonings, and cooking methods. By contrast, Chinese naming practices favor the substitution of concrete, perceptually salient representations for abstract concepts.

## 2. Data collection

The data of this study comprises 171 dish-name instances with their English counterparts, drawn from the official standardized documents in the culinary sector – *Translation Standards for Technical Culinary Terminology and Dish Names in Sichuan Cuisine of China* (DB51/T 2502–2018, hereinafter briefly referred to as TSTCTD), issued by

Quality and Technical Supervision Bureau of Sichuan province (now Administration for Market Regulation of Sichuan Province). In this study, the officially provided translations in TSTCTD are adopted as the default versions, with revised translations introduced only when necessary.

Through the analysis of Sichuan dish names from TSTCTD, it is found that the naming of Sichuan dishes is not merely descriptive, instead, it frequently involves vivid metaphors, metonymies, historical allusions, mythological icons punning and other forms of wordplay, while metonymy functioning as the core mechanism of naming practice.

### 3. Metonymic nature of construal and language

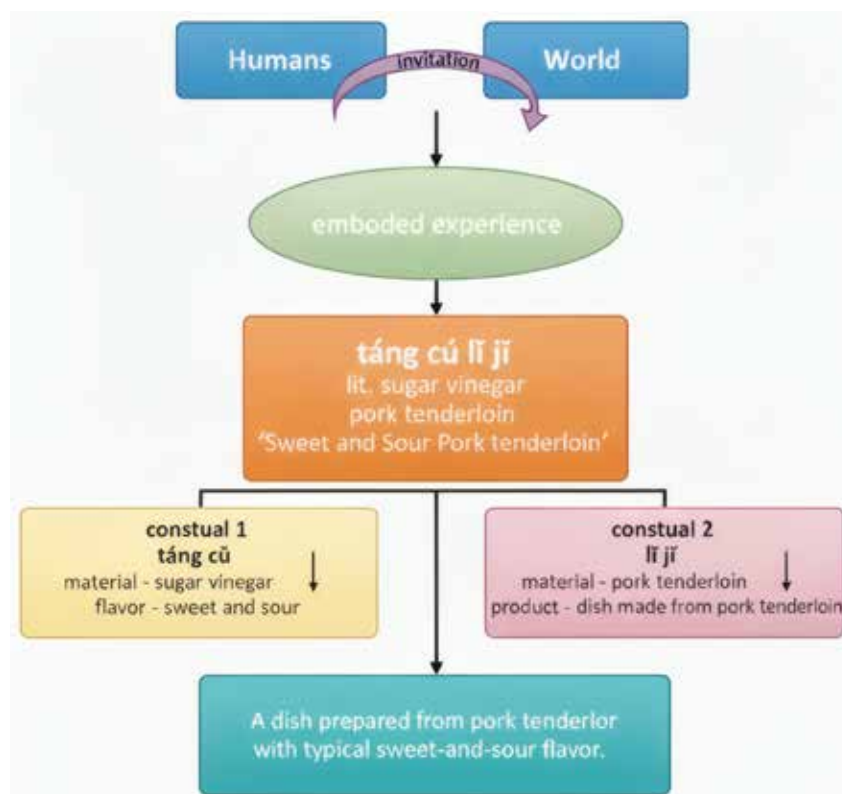
In general, language is a metonymic manifestation of human conceptualization, based on embodied experience gained through interaction with the world. According to Lin Zhengjun (2025), human perceptual and kinesthetic experience emerging from the interaction with the world are integrated into cognitive domain, a relatively stable conceptual structures formed through the categorization of the embodied experience, which I take to be equivalent to

Kövecses’s notion of “domain” (2017). Prototypical elements abstracted from such experience give rise to pre-conceptual concrete cognitive images, which are further schematized into abstract conceptual structures. And it is these conceptual structures that function as the semantic source of linguistic constructions.

Along the chain from embodied experience to domain, conceptual structure, and ultimately linguistic construction, each level constitutes a PART FOR WHOLE metonymic instantiation of its source, whereby a selectively foregrounded (Talmy, 2003) or profiled (Langacker, 1987) portion stands for a more complex relational whole. Constructions emerge as conventionalized symbolic pairings (Goldberg, 2006) grounded in metonymic compression of embodied relations, rather than arbitrary form-meaning associations.

Hence, constructional form is not an arbitrary independent formal template, but rather a schematic reflection of relational structure in embodied experience. The metonymic grounding, in other words, metonymic compression of embodied relational structure, accounts for the inseparability of form and meaning in constructions.

**Figure 1.** *The metonymic conceptual processing of táng cù lǐ jī*



From the epistemological level, humans cannot grasp all facets of an entity, but only aspects of it – profiles. The experiential input gathered through the motor-sensory system is a comprehensive whole with rich and multidimensional information. Yet only certain salient and contextually relevant aspects are selectively attended to and subjectively processed in order to form concepts in the process of conceptualization. The selected parts constitute a abstraction of the experience, that is, partial construals of experience, showcasing a metonymic relationship. Similarly, the entities in the reality (signified) and linguistic symbols (signifier) comprise metonymic relationship by highlighting particular conceptual elements within a whole, thereby achieving specific semantic effects. A signifier provides only cognitive reference points, instead of a related whole, to evoke the mental representation of an entity. Metonymy, typically including part-whole relationship, is a cognitive mechanism based on conceptual contiguity (Radden, G., & Kövecses, Z., 1998) and pragmatic inferencing. To be more specific, Metonymy as a mid-level cognitive mechanism means that it occupies an intermediate level in our cognitive architecture – neither purely perceptual nor fully propositional, but one that enables situated, context-dependent inferencing based on associative contiguity (Panther & Thornburg 2005; Barcelona 2000). The metonymic conceptual processing of *táng cù lǐ jī* (lit. sugar vinegar pork tenderloin ‘Sweet and Sour Pork tenderloin’) is taken as an illustrative example:

#### 4. Metonymic nature of culinary naming constructions

For examples summarized in the following chart, the form difference between endocentric construction and exocentric construction is motivated by human common cognitive habits.

##### 4.1 Metonymic endocentric constructions

Endocentric constructions for Sichuan dish names in the source Chinese are all characterized by right-headedness. A total of 156 endocentric constructions are identified in the corpus, representing 91.2% of the total.

Within such endocentric construction, the semantic head  $[b]_{sh}$  is realized by the nominal N in  $[A N]N$ ,  $[V N]N$  and  $[N_1 N_2 N_3]N$ ,

denoting the food entity itself, namely, what the dish is. By contrast, the slot  $[a]_{am}$  functions as a modifier encoding salient attributes of the dish, including color, shape, flavor, or ingredient, thus occupying a secondary place in terms of semantic importance. The naming pattern reflects the common etymological sequence: know at first the *nature* of an entity, i.e. *what it is*; and then its *attributes*, i.e. *how it is*.

The internal structure of this construction reflects a conventional etymological sequencing grounded in embodied cognition: identification of the entity’s ontological status precedes the specification of its perceptual or functional properties, that is, *what it is* is profiled prior to *how it is*.

As stated above,  $[a]_{am}$  is a metonymic representation of all the properties of the dish. The profiled, or highlighted, feature falls within the realm of “basic cognitive domain” (Evans 2019), including color, shape and odor, which are of primary concern to customers. In  $[V N]N$  construction,  $[VN]$  sequence does not emphasize the behavioral process of imposing the act V on the entity N. Instead, the construction coerces the verbal element into a *result-oriented* interpretation, whereby V is semantically reanalyzed as indicating a specific flavor *outcome* derived from the cooking process denoted by V that the food item has undergone. Motivated by a metonymic mapping of PROCESS FOR PRODUCT, specifically, COOKING PROCESS FOR SALIENT PROPERTY OF THE RESULTANT DISH,  $[VN]N$  construction is employed for the designation of a culinary item. As stated by Song (2022: 47):

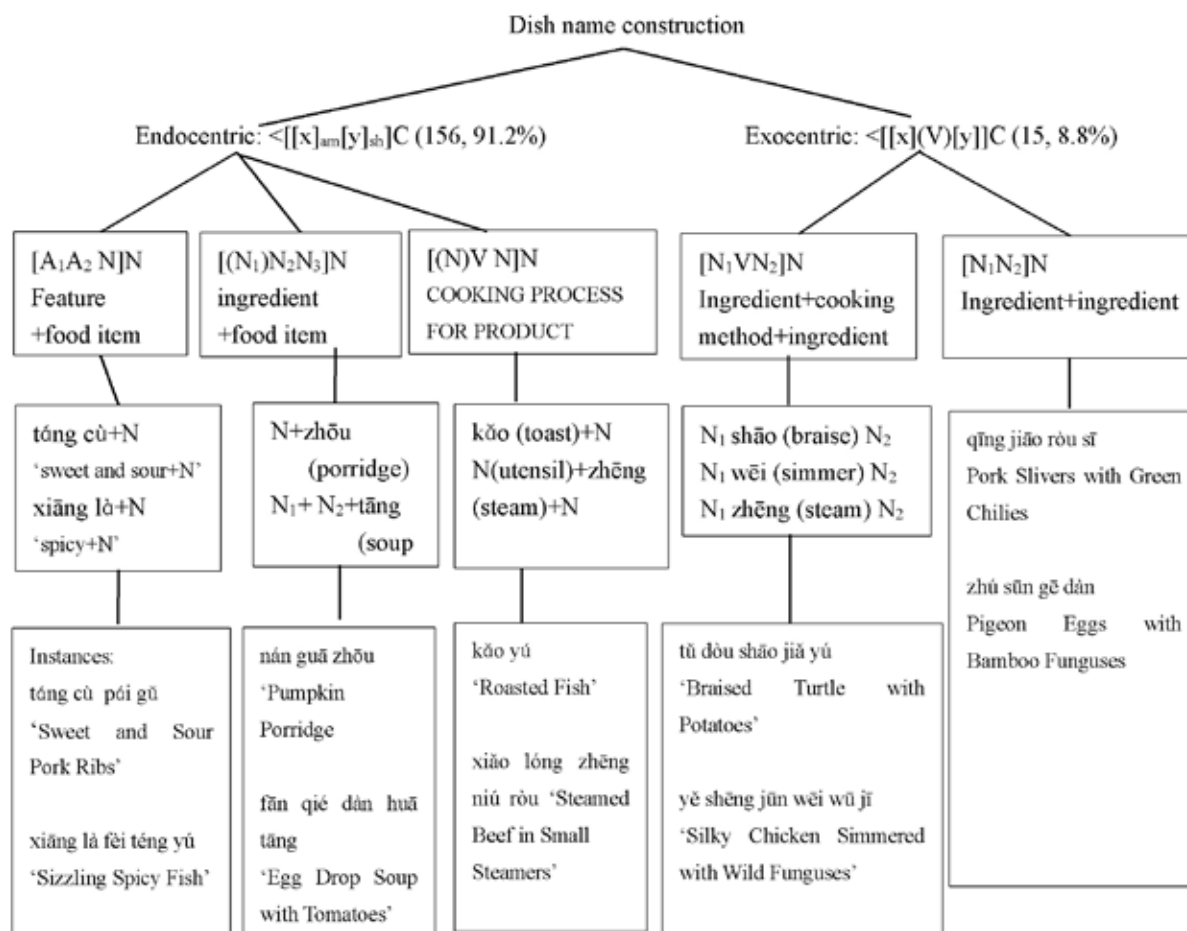
*The functions of modifier-head compounds are naming and classification. Their semantic relations can be generalized as ‘quale+entity’, whereby Vs are not supposed to express actions but specify qualia features, such as telic roles, states, conventionalized attributes, constitutive roles, and so forth.*

The terms quale (singular) and qualia (plural) mentioned above were first introduced by Johnston et al. (1999), as an analytical tool in the framework of generative lexicon theory (Pustejovsky, 1991) for noun-noun compounds by specifying the roles of modifiers in relation to the head noun. In English and Italian compounds, modifiers such

as wine in wine glass, bullet in bullet hole, and silicon in silicon breast respectively encode purpose, cause, and material, corresponding

to the telic, agentive, and constitutive roles. The last of four roles is the formal role, which defines the entity's ontological type.

**Figure 2.** Categorization and Hierarchical Inheritance of Dish Name Constructions



*am*=attributive modifiers (i.e., adjectives denoting characteristics, or past participles indicating cooking methods);

*sh*=semantic head, usually dish types;

*c*=an entire construction, a higher-level category

*PS*: The green marked part can be realized by more than one item

Building directly on the qualia-structure account outlined above, the naming of Sichuan dishes can be analyzed as a systematic exploitation of different qualia roles, in accordance with culturally specific preferences.

Under the Sichuan culinary ideal of *sè xiāng wèi*, that is, 'harmonious integration of color, aroma, and taste', modifiers Adj. in the [AN] construction which occupy the slot  $[x]_{am}$ , primarily encode elements of the formal role as defined by Pustejovsky (1991). This slot is instantiated by lexical units denoting salient perceptual properties such as color, smell, and taste. Within

generative lexicon theory, the formal role can also encompass attributes including orientation, size, shape, and dimensionality, which serve to situate and individuate an entity within a broader cognitive domain and to distinguish it from other entities of the same kind.

A Sichuan dish typically contains multiple ingredients and therefore licenses a potentially rich set of lexical items encoding its constitutive role. However, constrained by principles of naming economy, dish names rarely profile more than three constitutive elements. Such selective profiling does not aim

at an exhaustive representation of the dish's properties; rather, it constitutes a metonymic instantiation of the culinary whole via its most salient components (e.g. (1) pumpkin porridge, which profiles a single core ingredient, and (2) egg-drop soup with potatoes, which profiles two).

Beyond constitutive information, many dish names foreground a telic role, as in (3) wǔgǔ yǎngshēng zhōu 'five-grain health-preserving porridge' (This example is the only one not drawn from the TSTCTD corpus; it is included solely to illustrate the point). A substantial number of well-known dishes further evoke historic narratives or origin legends, thereby invoking agentive or historical dimensions.

In sum, Sichuan dish names selectively draw on one to three elements from the full set of telic, agentive, constitutive, and formal roles. What are profiled is not arbitrary, but the features that are cognitively most salient, culturally most conventional, and commercially most valued as a perceived selling point.

#### 4.2 Metonymic exocentric constructions

The category of exocentric dish-naming constructions are primary instantiated by the patterns  $N_1VN_2$  and  $N_1N_2$ , as shown in the above figure. The  $N_1VN_2$  pattern designates the resulting dish produced through a cooking event/ method, where two (at most three) ingredient-denoting nouns  $N_1$  and  $N_2$  undergo a processual action lexically encoded by  $V$ . In cognitive linguistic perspective, this construction profiles a causative event structure, which includes both participants (ingredients) undergoing a transformation (a culinary action).

By contrast, the  $N_1N_2$  pattern foregrounds only the principal ingredients, leaving the cooking process unexpressed and conceptually backgrounded. Such selective profiling is termed as "meaning foci" by Kövecses (habitually profiled aspects)" (Kövecses, 2017, 334). This reflects a general metonymic mechanism, in the broad cognitive-linguistic sense, whereby human conceptualization operates through selective profiling rather than exhaustive representation. The same mechanism is further evidenced in the following dish-naming metonymic patterns.

### 5. Metonymic mechanisms in naming culinary items

The role of associative contiguity in metonymic referencing is fully exhibited in the construction of dish names. The analysis first examines two metonymic patterns that are commonly involved in the naming of Sichuan dishes, and then turns to a discussion of other, less general types.

Dish names often employ metonymic reasoning to select salient aspects to stand for the whole set of aspects or elements. (a) MATERIAL FOR PRODUCT is the predominant metonymic patterns, whose instantiations accounting for 53.2% of all dish names. For instance, in (4). *kǎo jī*, 'roast chicken', the raw material *jī*, 'chicken' stands metonymically for the dish as the finished product is made from that material. Within Kövecses and Radden's (1998) framework, this pattern constitutes a case of SOURCE-PRODUCT metonymy, whereby the raw material *jī* 'chicken' serves as a cognitively salient source entity that affords mental access to the target, namely the dish construed as the finished product within the same conceptual domain. Such metonymic profiling not only promotes cognitive economy in categorization but also foregrounds the element that is most experientially immediate and salient to the conceptualizer.

Chinese dishes are known for the multi-layer flavor combination. (b) FLAVOR TYPICAL FOR MIXTURES OF FLAVORS, in which most conspicuous flavors are highlighted to cover a range of mixing flavors, as shown in (5). *má là* (The italicized part represent the linguistic units which undergo metonymic projection. The same applies to the following examples) *niú ròu*, 'Mala/ Spicy and Numbing Beef'. The instantiations of this pattern constitute the second most frequent category of all dish names in TSTCTD, accounting for 13.5% of the total.

There are more types of metonymies, as shown below:

#### (c) PROPERTY FOR INGREDIENT

(6) *huǒ bào shuāng cuì* – Stir Fried Double Crisp

(7) *kǒu kǒu cuì* – lit. Bite crisp, trans. as Crispy Bites (crispy lettuce stems). It is suggested to be revised as Crispy Lettuce Bites so as to differentiate from Stir Fried Double

Crisp on the one hand, and maintain concise on the other hand.

Take *huǒ bào shuāng cuì* as an illustrative case of the PROPERTY FOR INGREDIENT metonymy. The adjective *cuì* ‘crisp’ not only denotes the salient textural quality of the dish but also functions referentially to the two central ingredients, *zhū dǔ* ‘pork tripe’ and *huáng hóu* ‘beef aorta’, which inherently possess this property of crispness. Likewise, in the second example, property crispness stands for the ingredient – diced lettuce.

(d) For the type PLACE FOR FLAVOR, there are:

(8) *Sìchuān pào cài* – Sichuan Pickles

(9) *Chuānběi liáng fěn* – Northern Sichuan Pea Jelly

(10) *Jūntún guō kuī* – Juntun Fried Pies

(11) *Xīpǔ nián yú* – Xipu Catfish

In the above PLACE FOR FLAVOR pattern, the geographic origins highlights the popular cooking styles and favorable flavors in these regions and thus serves as metonymic vehicles for the target concept of flavors through geology-local flavor projection.

(e) The concrete instantiations of PRODUCER FOR PRODUCT are as follows:

(12) *lǎo mā tù tóu* – Laoma Rabbit Heads

(13) *má pó dòu fu* – Mapo Doufu

(14) *Zhōng shuǐ jiǎo* – Zhong’s Jiaozi

(15) *Lài tāng yuán* – Lai’s Tangyuan

The creators’ names Laoma, Mapo, Zhong and Lai function as vehicles evoking qualities such as craftsmanship, authenticity and uniqueness.

(f) COLOR TYPICAL OF A STATE FOR THE STATE

(16) *hóng shāo* – brown braise

instantiation: *hóng shāo zhū ròu* – Brown Braised Pork

*hóng shāo bào yú* – Brown Braised Abalones

*hóng shāo qún biān* – Brown Braised Turtle Shell Brims

*hóng shāo ròu* – Brown Braised Pork

(17) *huáng mèn jī* – Golden Braised Chicken

Through this pattern the term indicating typical final color of a dish serves metonymically to provide mental access to the dish’s

“optimal end-stage” (Brdar. et al, 2020). In the examples, *hóng* ‘Brown’ and *huáng* ‘Golden’ profile the visually salient end-state produced by prolonged and sufficient braising, rather than merely describing surface appearance. The metonymic mapping thus foregrounds outcome quality over process through diagnostically reliable indicators of completion.

(g) MANNER OF ACTION FOR THE RESULT OF THE ACTION

(18) *yī pǐn guō tiē* – lit. Premium pan on “Premium Pan-Fried Dumplings”

(19) *lǚ zhū tí* – lit. marinate pork feet, “pork feet simmered in spiced broth”

(20) *gān shāo dà xiā* – lit. braise dry prawns, “dry braised prawns”

(21) *qīng zhēng jiāng tuán* – lit. light-flavored steam longsnout catfish, “Steamed Longsnout Catfish”. It is suggested to be revised as “light-flavored Steamed Longsnout Catfish” since diners’ ordering decisions are primarily guided by flavor profiles, rendering “light-flavored” a decision-relevant criterion that should be explicitly represented.

(22) *yān xūn pái gǔ* – Smoked Pork Ribs

(23) *ruǎn shāo zǎi nián* – Braised Baby Catfish. It is suggested to be revised as “Slow Braised Baby Catfish” where “soft”. “Slow braised”, in contrast to “Dry Braised”, describes a prolonged, low-heat cooking process that makes the ingredients tender and allows flavors to be fully absorbed.

(24) *zhú kǎo yín xuě yú* – Roasted Cod on a Bamboo Platter

(25) *gān shāo* – dry braised  
instantiation: *gān shāo liáo shēn* – Dry Braised Sea Cucumber

*gān shāo yú* Dry – Braised Fish

(26) *gān biān* – dry fried  
instantiation: *gān biān shàn sī* – Dry Fried Eel Slivers

*gān shāo yú* – Dry Braised Fish

In the above example (18), manner of action is realized by locative adverbial (LOC Adv.) construction instead of canonical expression Adv. V. The locative expression “*pan on*” ‘on the pan’ originally refers to the spatial setting where a cooking event takes place. Through metonymic extension (which I tend to refer to as metonymic inferential chain), the location is recruited to evoke the cooking

action typically associated with that location (i.e. pan-frying), and further to profile the resultant state produced by that action. As a result of this manner of action, namely pan-frying, the dumplings undergo salient changes in appearance (e.g. shape and surface color), texture, crispness, and flavor.

This observation is consistent with Song Zuoyan's (2022, p. 42) claim that "The major difference between Roasted Duck and Duck Simmer in Spiced Broth resides not in the cooking manners but in the resultant states such as color, fragrance and taste which are formed due to the former." From which we can clearly see that resultant state of a dish is typically the profiled target of conceptualization, regardless of the specific metonymic vehicle through which it is accessed. Whether the vehicle takes the form of manner (i.e. *lǚ* 'marinate', *shāo* 'braise', *zhēng* 'steam'), location, action or instrument, it serves the function of providing conceptual access to the resultant state.

(h) CONTAINER FOR THE CONTAINED

(27) *lěng guō yú* – Fish Cold Pot. It is suggested to be revised as "Fish in Cold Pot"

(28) *bō bō jī* – Bobo Chicken. It is suggested to be revised as "Bobo bowl Chicken" to maintain the CONTAINER FOR THE CONTAINED metonymy

(29) *shí guō niú wā* – Bullfrog in a Stone Pot

(30) *gān guō jī* – Dry Braised Chicken in a Wok

(31) *xiǎo lóng bāo zi* – Baozi in Small Steamers

(32) *xiǎo lóng zhēng niú ròu* – Steamed Beef in Small Steamers

(33) *pén pén xiā* – Crayfish in a Basin

(34) *tán zi ròu* – Meat in a Clay Jar

Specifically, CONTAINER FOR THE CONTAINED metonymy serves two pragmatic functions in designation constructions of Sichuan Cuisine.

Illustrated by examples 27–29, conceptualizers tend to favor uniquely creative expressions over clichés. In culinary naming practice, novelty serves to attract diners' attention and stimulate consumption. For example, names such as Bullfrog in a Stone Pot (*shí guō niú wā*), Meat in a Clay Jar (*tán zi ròu*), and Bobo Bowl Chicken (*bō bō jī*) employ uncommon cookware as the metonymic

vehicle, prompting diners to wonder how the resultant state of the dish differs from that of conventionally prepared dishes, thus enhancing their ordering motivation.

On the contrary, examples 30–33, the pragmatic emphasis of the CONTAINER FOR THE CONTAINED metonymy shifts from novelty to the authentication of the dish, with the vehicle container functioning as a conceptual and cultural cue that evokes traditional culinary practices. And authenticity is also a crucial criterion in evaluating a dish.

(I) MATERIAL FOR FLAVOR

(35) *má jiàng fèng wěi* – lit. sesame paste phoenix tails, "Phoenix Tails with Sesame Paste (lettuce tips with sesame paste)"

(36) *pào jiāo mò yú zǎi* – Baby Cuttlefish with Pickled Chilies

(37) *pào jiāo niú wā* – Bullfrog with Pickled Chilies

(38) *shuāng jiāo shí bān yú* – Double-chili Grouper

(39) *téng jiāo féi niú* – Beef with Green Sichuan Peppercorns

(40) *huò xiāng lú yú* – Ageratum Flavored Perch

(41) *dòu bàn yú* – Fish in Chili Bean Sauce

(42) *suān cài yú* – Fish with Pickles

(43) *táng cù cuì pí yú* – lit. sugar vinegar crispy fish, "Sweet and Sour Crispy Fish"

(44) *hóng yóu ěr piàn* – Pork Ear Slices in Chili Oil

(45) *jiāo zhī duō bǎo yú* – Turbot in Chili-flavored Sauce

(46) *cōng shāo tí jīn* – Braised Pork Feet Tendons with Spring Onions

(47) *jiàng* – sweet flour paste

instantiation: *jiàng bào yā shé* – Stir Fried Duck Tongues with Sweet Flour Paste

*jiàng ròu sī* – Pork Slivers with Sweet Flour Paste

*jiàng shāo dōng sǔn* – Braised Winter Bamboo Shoots with Sweet

Flour Paste

In examples (35)–(47), all italicized nouns, which literally denote ingredient materials, are metonymically extended to profile the flavor produced by these ingredients. This shift instantiates the metonymic pattern MATERIAL FOR FLAVOR, whereby a salient seasoning ingredient comes to represent the gustatory quality it conventionally evokes.

Through this metonymic compression, the dish names foreground sensory expectations.

(j) LOCAL CELEBRITY FOR PRODUCT metonymy:

(48) Tài bái jī – Taibai Chicken

(49) Tài bái jiàng ròu – Taibai Pork in Sweet Flour Paste

(50) Dōng pō zhǒu zi – Dongpo Pork Knuckle

These shows a smart naming strategy to boost popularity by mapping the reputation of local celebrities, i.e., Taibai and Dongpo, to dishes. Tài bái is the courtesy name of China’s illustrious Tang-dynasty poet Li Bai, who is believed to born in Jiangyou, Sichuan Province. The LOCAL CELEBRITY FOR PRODUCT metonymy is the result of the inferential chain of two metonymies:

PEOPLE FOR PLACE: Taibai for Sichuan;

PLACE FOR FLAVOR: Sichuan for taste, aroma, culinary style in Sichuan’s regional cuisine;

The conceptual metonymy helps to achieve linguistic economy and also boost appeal to diners. A single lexical form Taibai efficiently conveys both provenance and taste of the dish. The is true for all examples under this category.

(k) CULTURAL ICON FOR PRODUCT

(51) lóng chāo shǒu – Long’s Wonton

While Taibai and Dongpo fall within the domain of historical celebrities, Long (Dragon), a mythical creature rather than a historical figure, functions similarly in terms of metonymic projection. In essence, both LOCAL CELEBRITY FOR PRODUCT and CULTURAL ICON FOR PRODUCT involve the projection of culturally salient meanings associated with a symbolic icon – be it human

or mythical – onto a culinary product. Such naming practices endow the dish not only with sensory appeal but also with cultural preference and emotional resonance, offering diners a dual pleasure of taste and symbolic experience. For Chinese diners, food is not only an essential means of sustenance, but also a source of refined taste and culturally embedded enjoyment.

On the one hand, these above examples reflect Langacker’s (1991: 97) notion of “established senses”, that is, meanings frequent enough to be entrenched and lexicalized as meaning-form pairings, which helps explain the stability and recognizability of these naming constructions. LOCAL CELEBRITY FOR PRODUCT and CULTURAL ICON FOR PRODUCT metonymic patterns gain culturally established interpretation and become conventionalized in use within specific Chinese cultural contexts, where frequent repetition has entrenched them as naming constructions.

On the other hand, metonymic mechanism is the underlying motivation for both the naming of the original dish names and the composite pattern of their translated versions. The pervasive usage of metonymy in Chinese dish names is partly due to the practical need to extinguish one dish from the rest with its most salient features. It is language users’ instinctive inclination toward cognitive economy to resort to metonymy when facing a wide range of information about multi-dimensional dish features of different regional cuisines of China. Over time, these metonymic patterns get lexicalized as productive schematic constructions that allow new extensions, shown as follows:

**Table 1.** Categorization, realization and frequency of metonymic patterns in TSTCTD

Types of metonymic mechanisms	Grammatical realization	Endocentric or exocentric	Token frequency	Percentage
(a) FLAVOR TYPICAL FOR MIXTURES OF FLAVORS	Adj. + N	endocentric	23	135%
(b) MATERIAL FOR PRODUCT	(Adj.) + Adj. + N N + N Adv. + V + N N + V + N	endocentric and exocentric	91	532%

Types of metonymic mechanisms	Grammatical realization	Endocentric or exocentric	Token frequency	Percentage
(c) PROPERTY FOR INGREDIENT	VP + Adj. Adv. + Adj.	endocentric	2	11‰
(d) PLACE FOR FLAVOR	N + N	endocentric	4	23‰
(e) PRODUCER FOR PRODUCT	N + N	endocentric	4	23‰
(f) COLOR TYPICAL OF A STATE FOR THE STATE	Adj. + N	endocentric	5	29‰
(g) MANNER OF ACTION FOR THE RESULT OF THE ACTION	Adj. + N (LOC) +V V + N Adv. + V + N	endocentric	11	64‰
(h) CONTAINER FOR THE CONTAINED	(Adj.) N + N	endocentric	8	47‰
(i) MATERIAL FOR FLAVOR	N + N N + V + N	endocentric and exocentric	16	94‰
(j) LOCAL CELEBRITY FOR PRODUCT	N + N	endocentric	3	18‰
(k) CULTURAL ICON FOR PRODUCT	N + N	endocentric	1	6‰
Total			168	98%

*PS: There are 171 dish names in total in TSTCTD*

From the statistical analysis, it is evident that metonymy plays a central role in the culinary designation constructions, accounting for 98% of the instances in the investigated corpus. With regard to the distribution of sub-patterns, the most prevalent is MATERIAL FOR PRODUCT with 91 tokens, followed by FLAVOR TYPICAL FOR MIXTURES OF FLAVORS (23 tokens) and MATERIAL FOR FLAVOR (16 tokens). In the latter, *jiàng* ‘sweet flour paste’ is the prototypical one with highest type frequency. The CULTURAL ICON FOR PRODUCT pattern is represented by only a single instance, though this may differ in dish names drawn from other culinary traditions. All eleven metonymic patterns function to profile the most salient features of dishes in the most economical and vivid way.

## 6. Conclusion

This study contributes theoretically by unraveling the metonymic nature and pat-

terns in dish-naming constructions, thereby deepening our understanding of the role of metonymy in human language. The findings have practical implications for menu translation and Chinese language teaching for non-native speakers, and may also facilitate understanding Chinese cultural narratives. However, this study has certain limitations. The corpus comprises an exhaustive analysis of a limited number of data – only instances drawn from TSTCTD and metonymic patterns observed within this dataset. Future research will expand the corpus to include dish names from other major culinary traditions on the one hand, and include comparative analyses with dish names from other countries on the other hand, so as to identify both universal patterns and culture-specific idiosyncrasies in culinary naming practices.

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