



## Naming Chinese Dishes in a Cognitive Semantic Perspective

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**Abstract:** *The naming of Chinese dishes is a linguistic practice that not only reflects culinary aspects but also embodies cognitive meanings related to a society's culture, history, and social values. This study investigates the naming of Chinese dishes from a cognitive linguistics perspective, focusing on how language patterns create associations, symbolism, and representation in food nomenclature. The research utilizes the documentary video A Bite of China (舌尖上的中国), which showcases various dishes from different regions in China. The documentary provides insights into the origins, history, and cultural significance of these dishes. Through qualitative analysis, the study examines how cognitive concepts such as metaphors and conceptual schemas influence the selection and understanding of dish names. The findings reveal that the naming of Chinese dishes carries cognitive semantic meanings. Dish names function not only as culinary identifiers but also as conceptual representations that draw from source and target domains to convey cultural narratives, symbolism, and significant social values. The research highlights the intricate interplay between language, culture, and cognition in constructing the meaning of food in Chinese society. By understanding the cognitive mechanisms behind dish nomenclature, this study contributes to a deeper appreciation of the cultural and linguistic dimensions of Chinese cuisine. The findings offer valuable insights for linguists, cultural researchers, and culinary enthusiasts in exploring the broader implications of language in gastronomic traditions.*

**Keywords:** *Dish Naming, China, Cognitive Semantics, Metaphor, Image Schemas, Culture*

### INTRODUCTION

Chinese culture has long been known as one of the oldest civilizations in the world, with diverse and rich traditions. This culture offers a unique and immersive experience in terms of culinary delights. It's not just about taste and cooking techniques but also includes philosophical values, symbolism, and stories implicit in each dish. Chinese cuisine reflects its people's cultural values, beliefs, and way of life, so food is not only a physical consumption but also a cultural symbol (Saputra, 2024).

One of the interesting elements of Chinese cuisine is the naming of the dishes. The names of dishes are often laden with conceptual metaphors that link food to other aspects of life, such as luck, well-being, or beauty. This is aesthetically beautiful and reflects how Japanese people view the world through language. For example, names such as the name of a dish served during Chinese New Year celebrations 糖醋鲤鱼 (sweet and sour fish) symbolize "every year's abundance" and its sweet and sour taste is sour and delicious, implying a sweet and abundant life. There is also an example of 梅菜扣肉 (boiled pork with pickled vegetables). The round shape of boiled pork symbolizes a happy reunion; Pickled cabbage means "happiness and smile." I wish you a happy life in the new year (Huo, Du, & Gu, 2020). These two examples of Chinese New Year dish names not only describe certain food ingredients but also imply symbolic meanings related to hope and culture.

In cognitive semantic studies, conceptual metaphors are essential in understanding how humans process the world through language (Chaer, Rasyad, Hidayat, Susanti, & Riyanto, 2024). This theory, introduced by Lakoff and Johnson,



asserts that the metaphors underlying language greatly influence our thinking and communication patterns. Metaphors are rhetorical devices and cognitive structures that reflect how humans understand the world (Ramadhaniyanti, Ina, & Bun, 2024). In this context, the names of Chinese dishes can reflect how Chinese people use language to describe culinary experiences and provide deeper meanings related to the food.

This research highlights the importance of understanding the relationship between dish names analysed using cognitive linguistic concepts and culinary culture as the embodiment of a cultural identity in a region. By analysing conceptual metaphors in Chinese dish names, we examine linguistic aspects and dig deeper into the cultural values behind the names. It is hoped that this research will provide new insights into the relationship between cognitive linguistic concepts related to thought patterns and Chinese culinary culture, rich in symbolism and philosophical meaning.

The concept of cognitive semantics refers to the basic framework of conceptual metaphor theory found in the book *Metaphors We Live By*, written by Lakoff and Johnson. This theory challenges the previous view, which views metaphor only as figurative language. Instead, metaphors are part of linguistic habits commonly used in everyday conversation. According to Purwanti (2020), The meaning produced by a metaphor is formed through agreement among the community of language speakers. Therefore, metaphor has become a form of communication commonly used in everyday life and is widely understood by speakers.

According to Hanif, Sawardi, & Wijaya (2023), a Metaphor is the result of forming a person's cognitive domain, which is formed through mapping between one concept as a source of meaning (source domain) and another concept as the goal of understanding (target domain). Meanwhile, (Haula, 2020) argues that metaphor does not lie in language itself but in how humans form or describe one mental domain in another. In conceptual metaphor theory, there are three main elements, namely: (1) Source domain, namely the concept that is the primary reference in providing meaning to the target domain; (2) Target domain, namely the concept that is understood through meaning obtained from the source domain; and (3) Mapping, namely the process of connecting the two domains in a conceptual framework.

Hanif, Sawardi, & Wijaya (2023) state that image schema is conceptual knowledge formed from human experience continuously interacting with the surrounding environment. This scheme represents various visual forms that consciously or unconsciously play a role in constructing meaning for humans. These visual forms appear when someone tries to explain and understand abstract concepts and the elements around them.

Cruse and Croft explain the concept of image scheme in Uzair, Wagiati, & Lyra (2023) explain the image scheme in table-1 image scheme category:

Table 1 Image Schema Category

Space	Up-Down, Front-Back, Left-Right, Near-far, Center-Periphery, Contact
Scale	Path
Container	Containment, In-Out, Surface, Full-Empty, Content



Force	Balance, Counterforce, Compulsion, Restraint, Enablement, Blockage, Diversion, Attraction
Unity/Multiplicity	Merging, Collection, Splitting, Iteration, Part-Whole, Mass-Count, Link
Identity	Matching, Superimposition
Existence	Removal, Bounded Space, Cycle, Object, Process

The concept of image schemes opens up the author's opportunity to research and connect image schemes with the idea of naming Chinese dishes in the hope of providing a better understanding of the application and use of the concept of image schemes in naming Chinese dishes. Additionally, Chinese culture, with its long history and rich traditions, has inspired various fields of study, such as linguistics, anthropology, and culinary arts. In culinary terms, Chinese food is known for its taste and depth of symbolism and philosophy (Qalbi & Nugroho, 2024). One unique aspect of Chinese culinary traditions is the naming of dishes, which often uses conceptual metaphors. This naming serves as an identification and reflects how Chinese people understand the world, their aesthetics, and their philosophy of life (Nurjanah, 2023).

In cognitive semantics, conceptual metaphor is the central concept that explains how humans understand and express experiences through language. This theory, first introduced by Lakoff and Johnson (1980), states that human thinking, understanding, and communication are strongly influenced by language's metaphorical structure (Pelangi, 2021). Metaphors are not only a tool of everyday communication but also play an important role in the formation of culture. In Chinese culture, the names of dishes reflect beliefs, hopes, and prayers for good luck or prosperity. For example, 八宝饭 not only refers to the ingredients in the dish but also symbolizes abundance and good luck.

This research aims to link cognitive semantics with the conceptual metaphors found in Chinese dish names while exploring how these naming traditions reflect the cultural values and worldview of Chinese society. The object of this research includes the names of Chinese dishes that use conceptual metaphors as part of their linguistic and cognitive structure. This research not only provides linguistic insight but also enriches understanding in cultural studies and anthropology because it shows how language is used to maintain and transmit cultural values.

Previous research shows that conceptual metaphors have a significant role in human life. Masthuroh (2020) highlights that metaphors are not only rhetorical devices but also cognitive tools for understanding the world. Kövecses (2005) explains further how conceptual metaphors shape human thought patterns and behaviour through language. In the context of Chinese culture, Sua, Ngah, & Abdullah (2014) highlight the importance of culinary culture in preserving community traditions and values. However, research on the integration of conceptual metaphors in Chinese dish-naming traditions is still limited.

This study is relevant to various studies that discuss the relationship between language and culture, especially in the context of cognitive semantics. This research contributes to the understanding of how language reflects and shapes culture. For



example, this study could be compared with similar research on the use of metaphor in the culinary traditions of other cultures, such as Japan or France, to provide a broader cross-cultural perspective. Therefore, this research is not only relevant for Chinese linguistic and cultural studies but also for cross-cultural studies.

Through this research, it is hoped that new insights will be gained about the relationship between cognitive semantic science and the names of Chinese dishes. It is also hoped that this research will become a basis for further studies regarding the relationship between language, culture, and cognition in culinary aspect.

## RESEARCH METHODS

The research method used in the study "Chinese Dish Naming in a Cognitive Semantic Perspective" includes four main components: research design, data sources, data collection methods, and data analysis procedures. This research uses a qualitative research design with an emphasis on cognitive semantics. The main focus is to analyse the conceptual metaphors contained in the names of Chinese dishes and understand their cultural significance. The source of research data is the names of dishes contained in the documentary video 舌尖上的中国. The documentary video was chosen because all of its episodes discuss culinary delights found throughout China, both cultural background and method. Its creation and origins. This research is descriptive and interpretive, aiming to reveal the cognitive and cultural structures that underlie linguistic expressions. By adopting a cognitive linguistic framework, this research examines how metaphors in dish names relate to Lakoff and Johnson's image schema (Haula, 2020), which reflects cultural values, beliefs, and worldviews.

Data collection was carried out in two stages. First, a literature review was carried out by examining the names of dishes in documentary videos as well as reading relevant books, journals, and articles to identify common patterns and themes in Chinese dish names, with special attention to the study of cognitive semantics and metaphor theory. Second, textual analysis of documentary video shows was carried out on the names of dishes to compile a complete list of dish names with selection criteria, including names that contain metaphorical elements or cultural references.

In the data analysis process, researchers applied the translational equivalent method. The equivalent method is an approach that uses determinants outside of language (Listyaningrum, 2021). Meanwhile, the translational method uses other languages as a determining tool (Herliana, Prasetyowati, Aryovather, & Haili, 2024). Furthermore, the techniques used include the same comparison technique, different comparison techniques, and the same principal connection technique (Antono, Zulaeha, & Baehaqie, 2019). After the data is analysed, the results are presented in an informal form.

Data were analysed using a combination of qualitative content analysis and cognitive semantic techniques. The first step is metaphor identification by examining the names of dishes to find metaphors and metaphorical expressions. This step uses the theoretical framework of conceptual metaphor and image schema as the main guide. Then, each metaphor is analysed by mapping the source domain and target domain, as well as determining an image scheme to understand the cultural context. It goes on to reveal its symbolic meaning by focusing on how this metaphor reflects Chinese cultural values, such as harmony, abundance, and good luck. Finally, the



research findings were compared with existing studies in the fields of cognitive semantics and Chinese culinary traditions to ensure their validity and reliability.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of the analysis show that in naming the names of dishes contained in the show 舌尖上的中国, several types of conceptual metaphor classifications were found based on Lakoff and Johnson's theory. Apart from that, there is also an image scheme according to Cruse and Croft's theory.

According to Lakoff and Johnson, a structural metaphor is a concept constructed metaphorically by using another concept as a reference. This structural metaphor relies on two main domains, namely, the source domain and the target domain. The formation of structural metaphors is based on systematic relationships that emerge from everyday experiences.

### Data 1/Session 1-Episode 3

瓦块鲤鱼

Source : 瓦块 (roof tile)

Target : 鲤鱼 (goldfish)

Scheme : Identity

The dish 瓦块鲤鱼 is an example of a structural metaphor that uses an identity scheme, where the concept of 瓦块 (roof tile) as a source is associated with 鲤鱼 (goldfish) as a target. Based on Lakoff and Johnson's theory, this metaphor is included in the category of structural metaphor because it transfers concepts from the source domain to the target domain based on everyday life experiences. In this context, the roof tiles, which are usually square in shape and function as protection, are connected to the shape of the pieces of fish, which are the main ingredients in this dish. The name of this dish arises because the pieces of cooked fish have an appearance that resembles roof tiles in shape and arrangement, allowing for a visual association between the two concepts. This metaphor not only serves as a creative way to name dishes but also reflects a tendency in Chinese culinary culture to associate food with familiar objects in everyday life. Thus, 瓦块鲤鱼 shows how language, experience, and culture play a role in creating identity relationships between food and visual elements that are recognized by society.

### Data 2/Session 1-Episode 3

荷包里脊

Source : 荷包 (drawstring wallet)

Target : 里脊 (pork tenderloin)

Scheme : Identity

Data 2 dish name 荷包里脊 is an example of a structural metaphor that uses an identity scheme, where the concept of 荷包 (drawstring wallet) as the source is transferred to 里脊 (pork tenderloin) as the target. This dish was first introduced during the Qing Dynasty, when drawstring wallets were a popular accessory and were



used to store coins. Inspired by the shape of the wallet, a chef created a dish that resembles a drawstring bag with minced meat inside, resulting in a visual appearance that resembles a small wallet. This metaphor was formed through associations between the physical form of food and everyday objects that were widely known in the culture of society at that time. The use of metaphors in naming dishes not only provides visual appeal but also reflects the creativity in Chinese culinary culture, where the shape and aesthetics of food often have symbolic meaning. Thus, 荷包里脊 is an example of how language and culinary traditions interact, creating identity relationships between food and cultural objects through imagination and visual associations.

#### Data 3/Session 2-Episode 2

冬瓜燕

Source : 燕菜 (swallow's nest soup)  
Target : 冬瓜 (white pumpkin)  
Scheme : Identity

In the name of Dish Data 3, Dish 冬瓜燕, which originates from Sichuan, is an example of a structural metaphor that uses an identity scheme by connecting two concepts, namely 燕菜 (swallow's nest soup) as the source and 冬瓜 (white pumpkin) as a target. The name of this dish was formed through visual association and imagination, where thinly sliced white pumpkin is then cooked in broth, resulting in an appearance that resembles clear swallow's nest soup. Although it does not contain a real swallow's nest, the dish is named so because of its similarity in texture and appearance. The process of transferring the concept from the swallow's nest to the white gourd in this metaphor shows how Chinese society connects the visual elements of food with objects that are more familiar and have high value, such as the swallow's nest, which is known as a luxurious and nutritious food. In addition to giving the dish appeal, this use of metaphor in naming also reflects the tendency in Chinese culinary culture to create associations that enrich the eating experience not only in terms of taste but also aesthetic and symbolic meaning. Thus, 冬瓜燕 is an example of how language and culinary traditions interact to shape perceptions of food through identity scheme.

#### Data 4/Session 2-Episode 4

蚂蚁上树

Source : 蚂蚁 (ant)  
Target : 上树 (climbing tree)  
Scheme : Identity

In data 4, the name of the dish 蚂蚁上树, which comes from Sichuan, is an example of a structural metaphor that uses an identity scheme by connecting two concepts, namely 蚂蚁 (ant) as a source and 上树 (climbing tree) as a target. This dish consists of vermicelli and minced meat, where the minced meat spread over the vermicelli looks like ants climbing a tree branch. Although there are no actual ants in



this dish, the name draws a visual similarity between the food and the scene of ants crawling on a tree. In this context, metaphors are formed based on everyday visual experiences that connect the shape and arrangement of food with something that is already familiar, namely the movement of ants on branches. This metaphor not only provides a unique and interesting name but also reflects the way Chinese people use imagination in naming food, often inspired by the shape or appearance of the dish. Thus, 蚂蚁上树 shows how language and culinary culture interact with each other to create meaning through identity schemes.

#### Data 5/Session 3-Episode 1

虾仁芙蓉

Source : 虾仁 (peeled shrimp)

Target : 芙蓉 (lotus flower)

Skema : Identity

The dish 虾仁芙蓉 is an example of a structural metaphor in Mandarin that uses an identity scheme by connecting two concepts, namely 虾仁 (peeled shrimp) as the source and 芙蓉 (lotus flower) as the target. The name reflects the link between the food's visual form and the characteristics of the lotus flower, where cooked egg whites create a soft, transparent texture resembling blooming flower petals. Apart from the visual aspect, the use of the word 芙蓉 also contains aesthetic and symbolic meaning in Chinese culture, which often associates lotus flowers with purity and beauty. This metaphor is rooted in the daily experiences of people who are accustomed to associating food with other objects that have similar shapes and textures, reflecting the important aesthetic values in Chinese cuisine.

### Factors in the Tendency to Naming Dishes

Human concepts and language develop through interactive experiences that take place in the real world, where individuals interact with their environment and experience cognitive processes that influence the way they understand the world. The formation of concepts in language not only involves subjective factors—such as personal experiences, perceptions, and individual interpretations of the world around them—but is also influenced by objective factors, namely cultural norms, traditions, and social values that exist in society. The naming of a dish, for example, is the result of combining these two factors. In this case, the natural, social, and cultural environment plays an important role in influencing how a food is named, creating certain tendencies in its choice (Hotimah, 2024).

### Cultural Selection in Naming Dishes

In Chinese culture, tradition has a very important position and is often considered more valuable than innovations that have no historical roots. This is reflected in various aspects of life, including in the culinary world, where naming dishes is not just an identity but also a means of enriching cultural and historical values. Many typical dishes are named after famous figures, historical events, or even legends passed down from generation to generation.



One famous example is 东坡肉, which is closely associated with Su Dongpo, a great literati, official and artist of the Song Dynasty. It is said that he first made this dish as a form of appreciation for the migrant workers who dredged the West Lake in Hangzhou. With its soft texture and rich taste resulting from the long cooking process, Dongpo Beef is not just a delicious dish but also tells a story about leadership, generosity, and the close relationship between the ruler and his people.

This phenomenon shows that culinary traditions in China not only function to fulfill gastronomic needs but also serve as a medium for conveying history, moral values, and cultural identity. By maintaining tradition-based food naming, people not only preserve recipes passed down from generation to generation but also ensure that their ancestral heritage lives on in modern life. This is what makes Chinese cuisine so unique—not only rich in taste but also rich in meaning.

The names of dishes in Chinese culture are often chosen with great consideration, reflecting the concepts of luck, prosperity, and exclusivity that are believed to bring blessings to those who enjoy them. In a society that highly values symbolism, naming food is not just a culinary identity but also a means of conveying good wishes and happiness. Names such as 如意年糕 cake, which symbolizes smoothness and good luck, and 神仙鸡, which describes the dish's extraordinary deliciousness to the point of being like to the food of the gods, are examples of how food is enriched with deep philosophical meaning.

Choosing a name with a strong meaning aims to create positive associations in the minds of consumers so that the dish is not only enjoyed in terms of taste but also provides a deeper emotional experience. Apart from that, this strategy also plays an important role in culinary marketing, increasing the attractiveness and selling value of food. A memorable and meaningful name can attract customers' attention, increase curiosity, and even make a dish more popular in society's culture. Thus, the tradition of naming food in Chinese culture not only preserves historical and philosophical values but also becomes an important element in the culinary industry, which continues to develop.

### **Personal Experience Trends in Naming Chinese Dishes**

In Chinese culinary tradition, naming a dish not only serves as an identity but also as a means of conveying the main characteristics of the dish. Names with a strong meaning are preferred over names that are generic or less significant because they can provide additional appeal to the food served. For example, 毛丝牛百叶 (the hair-streaked beef grille) not only mentions the main ingredient but also visually depicts the shape of a very thin piece of meat that resembles strands of hair, so that consumers can imagine its texture before tasting it. Choosing a name that reflects the unique characteristics of a dish helps increase its appeal in the eyes of culinary connoisseurs.

In addition, food naming in Chinese culture tends to prioritize concrete terms rather than abstract ones. This is related to human experience, which is largely formed through interaction with real objects in the world around us. Dish names that refer to real objects are easier to understand and remember and provide a stronger visual impression. Therefore, many foods are named by associating themselves with precious objects or natural elements that have high aesthetic appeal. For example, 翡翠菜羹 (jade vegetable soup) not only reflects the fresh and healthy green colour of jade but



also adds a sense of luxury and good symbolic value. Likewise, 水晶虾球 (crystal shrimp balls) depict the appearance of a dish that is clear and sparkling like crystal, giving an exclusive and appetizing impression.

Using a name that is concrete and has strong visual associations not only helps create a positive image of a dish but also acts as an effective marketing strategy. A catchy name can arouse curiosity, enrich the dining experience, and increase the overall appeal of the culinary delights. Thus, the tradition of naming dishes in Chinese culture not only reflects linguistic richness but also shows how aesthetics, symbolism, and sensory experience combine to create an unforgettable culinary experience.

### **Pragmatic Orientation in Naming Chinese Dishes**

In linguistics and psychology, humans are naturally more interested in new, unusual things than things that have been encountered frequently and are considered boring. This attraction to novelty also has an influence in the culinary world, especially in the naming of dishes. A unique and innovative name serves not only as a description but also as an element that arouses curiosity, enhances attraction, and enriches the dining experience. Therefore, when naming food, there is a tendency to use creative and unconventional terms to attract attention and differentiate one dish from others.

One interesting example is 虎皮尖椒 (the tiger skin sharp pepper). Although this name has no direct connection to tigers, the use of the term "tiger skin" creates a strong visual association. This name describes the surface texture of the chili, which, after frying, will wrinkle and have brown spots, resembling the striped pattern on a tiger's skin. The use of this metaphor not only clarifies the physical characteristics of the dish but also stimulates imagination and curiosity. Consumers who read the name will most likely be interested in seeing or trying the dish because they want to know how the food with this unique name looks and tastes.

More than just a language play, innovative dish naming also serves as an effective marketing strategy. In an increasingly competitive culinary world, restaurants and food retailers need to find ways to make their products stand out among the many options available. A catchy, unusual name can add to the appeal, help a dish be more memorable, increase the likelihood of customers ordering it, and even encourage them to share it on social media. For example, dishes with striking names tend to be photographed and uploaded more often to platforms like Instagram or TikTok, creating a viral effect that can increase the popularity of the dish.

Apart from that, the novelty of naming dishes also reflects the continuing evolution of culinary culture. As times change, food trends also change, and chefs and culinary industry players often experiment with new terms that are more relevant to modern market tastes. For example, some contemporary restaurants are now adopting more experimental names, incorporating elements of popular culture, or even using terms inspired by technology and science to create a futuristic feel. This shows that food naming is not just a label but is also part of an evolving narrative, connecting food with experience, imagination, and emotional appeal for consumers.

Thus, novelty in dish naming is not just about creativity but also about building a deeper experience for customers. Unique food names can create a strong first impression, generate curiosity, and ultimately increase overall culinary appeal. In an increasingly digitally connected world, this appeal can be the deciding factor in a dish's



success, turning it from just another menu item into something iconic and worthy of memory.

Naming dishes in Chinese culture is not just a matter of labelling food but is also a manifestation of the complex interaction between subjective and objective elements that make up a dish. Subjective factors involving cultural values, individual experiences, and social perceptions often determine how a dish is named. On the other hand, objective factors—such as the ingredients used, the cooking techniques applied, and the visual appearance of the dish—make an essential contribution to choosing an appropriate name. In this case, culinary language functions as a mirror that reflects not only the physical nature of food but also ideology, history, and people's understanding of their world.

Ultimately, naming dishes in Chinese culture is a form of expression rich in meaning and symbolism, which goes beyond mere labels for food. By understanding and appreciating the meaning behind the names of these dishes, we can better appreciate not only culinary riches but also the deep cultural heritage that continues to develop in society. In this case, food becomes a medium that unites various aspects of life—from history, philosophy, and aesthetics to social values—and language becomes a tool to celebrate and preserve them all.

## CONCLUSION

The conclusion of this study shows that naming Chinese dishes is a process influenced by complex interactions between language, culture, and cognition. Through a cognitive linguistic perspective, this research reveals how the use of metaphor, metonymy, and conceptual schemes in naming food not only describes the physical characteristics or taste of the dish but also conveys deep symbolic meaning. The names of Chinese dishes often contain cultural, historical, and social values that reflect the identity of the people. This naming also functions as a means of maintaining and preserving cultural heritage and creating an emotional connection between consumers and food. Thus, Chinese dish naming is more than just a culinary label but a medium of communication that combines elements of language, culture, and cognitive experience, enriching our understanding of how food can be a living and dynamic cultural expression.

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