

CHINA ENGLISH IN FICTION: LEXICAL FEATURES AND SOCIOLINGUISTICS FUNCTION IN *THE KITCHEN GOD'S WIFE*

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Abstract: This study presents a sociolinguistic analysis of the lexical features of China English through a close textual examination of Amy Tan's novel, *The Kitchen God's Wife*. The findings reveal that China English vocabulary in the novel exhibits culturally distinctive semantic traits and unique structural patterns shaped by dual cultural influences. Specifically, the lexicon displays strong Chinese characteristics across four semantic domains: material life, addresses and names, folklore and customs, and idioms and sayings. Meaning analysis underscores the intimate relationship between language and culture. These lexical items are realized through three main construction strategies: transliteration, transliteration with paraphrase, and loan translation. The flexible use of these strategies reflects the authors' distinctive bicultural background and literary style. This study aims to enhance the understanding of China English in literary contexts and to contribute to the analysis of Chinese American literature and the translation of Chinese culture.

Keywords: Chinese American literature; China English; Lexical features

1 INTRODUCTION

The globalization and localization of English have created a complex and multifaceted linguistic landscape in today's world. As Halliday notes [1], English is no longer solely owned by British or American speakers but has become an international language used by diverse communities worldwide—all while respecting the value of their native tongues. As a primary tool for global communication, English continually adapts to the cultural, political, and social contexts of its users, giving rise to numerous varieties of English with local characteristics. China English is one such variety, emerging from the integration of English with Chinese cultural and linguistic elements. It retains the core norms of standard English while incorporating features unique to Chinese expression. As China's global influence grows in areas such as politics, economy, and technology, more and more Chinese-specific terms have entered the English language. These expressions not only reflect changes in contemporary life but also represent significant historical and cultural moments. Therefore, studying China English vocabulary is crucial for enhancing cross-cultural communication and promoting Chinese culture worldwide.

Discussions around China English began in the late 1980s, initially focusing on its definition and attitudes toward it, and later shifting toward its linguistic characteristics. Sociolinguistic research tends to focus more on how English is used in specific contexts rather than how well it conforms to standard norms [2]. Most previous studies have examined China English in political documents, newspapers, or speeches, with relatively little attention paid to its use in literary works. Yet, China English often arises precisely when speakers need to express ideas specific to Chinese culture and society [3]. This is where “Chineseness” becomes a key feature of China English [4]. Literary works—especially those rooted in cultural narratives—offer a rich source of such expressions. That's why this paper focuses on Amy Tan's novel *The Kitchen God's Wife*, a Chinese American autobiographical work widely recognized as representative of Chinese-influenced English. The novel is filled with culturally specific terms related to history, customs, and everyday life in China. Since vocabulary is one of the most visible markers of linguistic variation, this study provides a detailed analysis of China English lexis in the novel, including both semantic features and word-formation patterns. Understanding these elements can help improve global comprehension of Chinese society and support the broader dissemination of Chinese language and culture.

This paper totally consists of five parts. Chapter 1 introduces the background information and the research significance of this paper. Chapter 2 reviews the previous studies of *The Kitchen God's Wife* and previous studies of lexical features of China English and Chinese English lexis in particular at home and abroad. This chapter also demonstrates related linguistic theories, Kachru's three concentric circles of English and Leech's seven types of meaning. Chapter 3 presents research questions and data collection and analysis of the paper. Chapter 4, as the main part of the paper, makes a discussion of semantic features of China English lexis in *The Kitchen's Wife* from four categories including terms of material life, terms of addresses and names, terms of folklore and customs and terms of idioms and sayings, and their constructional patterns including transliteration, transliteration plus paraphrase and loan translation. Chapter 5 summarizes the major findings, research limitations and suggestions for future research.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Previous Studies of *The Kitchen God's Wife*

Amy Tan's second novel, *The Kitchen God's Wife*, was published in 1991 and quickly became the subject of vibrant academic discussion both in China and abroad.

International scholars have approached the book from various angles, including mother-daughter relationships, multicultural identity, gender inequality, and narrative strategy. The theme of mother-daughter dynamics has received particularly strong attention. However, many scholars also contextualize these relationships within broader cultural and historical frameworks. For example, some researchers focus on multicultural identity in an era of globalization, while others emphasize the influence of patriarchal values on the characters' lives. In addition to thematic studies, some critics have focused on narrative techniques, such as the use of narrative therapy.

Similarly, Chinese scholars have shown strong interest in themes like identity and family relationships. Many emphasize the protagonist's journey toward self-awareness and resistance, rather than focusing solely on her traumatic experiences. Some researchers also employ cross-cultural perspectives to analyze character conflicts, aiming to improve how Chinese culture is represented and communicated globally. For instance, some researcher explores how Chinese images are sometimes misinterpreted in cross-cultural contexts, reflecting the narrative strategies used by Chinese American writers within mainstream Western culture. Meanwhile, some researchers offer a sociological analysis of the role of Winnie's first husband, broadening the critical approaches applied to the novel.

While existing studies have covered a wide range of topics, few have focused specifically on the language used in the novel. This paper aims to fill that gap by examining the lexical features of China English in *The Kitchen God's Wife*, with particular emphasis on cultural and linguistic expression.

2.2 Previous Studies of China English

After World War II, English solidified its role as a global lingua franca. Through contact with other languages, it absorbed new elements and evolved—giving rise to varieties such as China English. The concept of China English was first introduced by Ge Chuangui in 1980. Ge emphasized that English used in China should be able to express uniquely Chinese concepts and realities [3]. This notion was later refined by scholars like Wang Rongpei, who defined China English as a variety based on standard English yet incorporating distinctive Chinese linguistic and cultural features [5]. It is distinct from both “Chinese English” and “Chinglish,” which are more heavily influenced by literal translation or grammatical inaccuracies [6].

Research on China English has covered phonological, lexical, grammatical, and pragmatic features. Lexical studies, in particular, have shown how Chinese loanwords—through transliteration, translation, or creative coinage—have entered mainstream English, especially in fields like politics, economy, and culture [7]. In recent years, researchers have begun using corpora and empirical methods to analyze China English vocabulary. For example, Li Wenzhong [6] used corpus linguistics to study noun clusters in China English, while Yu Xi and Wen Qiufang [8] conducted quantitative studies on verbs and adjectives. Nonetheless, most domestic studies remain narrowly linguistic in focus, and often overlook sociocultural dimensions.

International scholars, on the other hand, have often focused on the historical origins and semantic categorization of Chinese loanwords in English. Many note that these terms entered English through early trade contacts, and often via Cantonese rather than Mandarin [7]. Some researchers highlight how these words reflect cultural developments and introduce new ideas without replacing existing English vocabulary [7]. Empirical studies remain relevant, as they reveal dialectal influences and sociolinguistic motivations behind word choice [2]. For instance, the use of loanwords often depends on cultural specificity and whether an equivalent term exists in English [7]. However, example selection in these studies can sometimes be subjective.

Although China English lexis has always been a central concern in relevant research, most studies rely on political, journalistic, or spoken data—leaving literary texts undervalued. Therefore, this paper examines *The Kitchen God's Wife* from a sociolinguistic perspective, focusing on the cultural, semantic, and structural features of China English vocabulary in a literary context.

2.3 Theoretical Foundation

2.3.1 Kachru's three concentric circles of English

The field of Chinese English vocabulary has evolved within the realm of global English studies. In the 1980s and 1990s, prompted by the global proliferation of English, the American linguist Kachru Braj [7], introduced the theory of “The Three Concentric Circles”. This theory illustrates how different variants of English are positioned in these circles, reflecting the historical diffusion of English worldwide. Kachru's theory holds significant sociolinguistic implications as it views language usage as a social construct and seeks to elucidate the interplay between language and society. A pioneering study by Xu [4] focused on the identification and classification of China English lexis. This research delved into not only comparisons with other English variants but also detailed analyses of lexis within specific regional contexts. Following Kachru's concentric circles framework, Xu classified China English lexis into three categories: the inner circle CE lexis comprising Chinese borrowings, like *mah-jong*; the outer circle CE lexis encompassing English words influenced by Chinese, such as *poker* (Chinese equivalent *puke*); and the expanding circle CE lexis consisting of words commonly used by both English and Chinese speakers like *people*. The distinctions between inner and outer circle lexis are key features of spoken and written China English, requiring readers or listeners to possess knowledge of the Chinese cultural context to fully grasp their meanings.

2.3.2 Leech's seven types of meaning

Generally, the meaning of a word is governed not only by the external object or idea it refers to, but also by the use of the word in a specific context and with a specific intention. G. Leech [7] identifies seven types of meaning in *Semantics*: conceptual, connotative, stylistic, affective, reflected, collective, and thematic. Conceptual meaning, considered fundamental in lexical semantics, denotes the direct relationship between a word and its referent. Usually, conceptual meaning is regarded to be significant to a lexical item as it is the central factor in linguistic communication, and is indispensable in the forming of the main function of language. In Leech's system, connotative, stylistic, affective, reflected, and collective meanings collectively form the associative meaning of a word, providing additional layers of interpretation. Thematic meaning, while less central, depends on a word's position within a sentence. The dual components of lexical meaning - conceptual and associative - are essential for understanding the nuances of language. Nida [9] outlines six sources of associative meanings in language, culture and translation, namely, the persons who use such lexemes; the settings in which the lexemes are generally employed; the occurrence of such lexemes in prior texts (intertextuality); contamination from linguistic collocations; contamination from homophones; cultural values associated with the referents of the lexemes. In the broad sense, associative meanings convey cultural meanings, emphasizing the importance of considering cultural contexts in language interpretation. Overall, conceptual meanings are universal and cognitive, facilitating interlingual translation, while associative meanings are culture-specific, highlighting the intricate relationship between language and culture.

3 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Questions

The study of sociolinguistics is conducted into the lexical features of China English appearing in the novel *The Kitchen God's Wife* written by Amy Tan and mainly focuses on the following two research questions:

First, what are the semantic features of China English lexis in *The Kitchen God's Wife*?

Second, what are the constructional patterns of China English lexis in *The Kitchen God's Wife*?

For the first question, the collected terms are divided into four categories in terms of their semantic fields. Drawing on Kachru's views about language and culture and Leech's theories on meaning, this paper provides a detailed description and analysis of the language in *The Kitchen God's Wife* at lexical level. For the second question, these terms are classified again to figure out the lexical constructional patterns of China English in *The Kitchen God's Wife*, referencing the translation strategies of borrowings, a prevalent device China English relies on. Notably, there exists a correlation between the two lexical features of China English highlighted by these research questions. Terms within each semantic field are further divided according to their constructional patterns. Similarly, terms under each translation strategy are further categorised according to their semantic fields.

3.2 Data Collection

This paper takes the Chinese American novel *The Kitchen God's Wife* as a case. The novel mainly involves one pair of Chinese mother's and American-born daughter's stories, many of which are set in a Chinese setting and the characters are all branded with Chinese culture to varying degrees. Therefore, it is rich in expressions of China English. With the influence of her family and cultural background, the author Amy Tan localises English to suit the Chinese context ingeniously. During data collection, based on a close reading of *The Kitchen God's Wife*, words, phrases and sentences that bear Chinese culture are selected. Notably, the lexical items collected as the data of this paper all refer to things and phenomena specific to Chinese culture, for which no equivalent can be found in English.

4 DATA ANALYSIS

By exploring linguistic forms and semantics in *The Kitchen God's Wife* at lexical level, this chapter explores semantic features and constructional patterns of China English lexis in the novel.

4.1 Semantic Features of China English Lexis in *The Kitchen God's Wife*

Localized lexis in *The Kitchen God's Wife* concerns many aspects of social life and facts of China. In the following analysis, some of them are described from four semantic categories: terms of material life, terms of addresses and names, terms of folklore and customs, terms of idioms and sayings. Although the four categories cannot cover all the China English lexis in the novel, they are sufficient in revealing the close relationship between Chinese language and Chinese culture.

4.1.1 Terms of material life

In *The Kitchen God's Wife*, many expressions related to material culture are deeply rooted in Chinese tradition. These terms are often closely linked to China's social reality and reflect specific historical periods, contributing to the novel's cultural authenticity and historical precision. Understanding these terms requires familiarity with Chinese social context. Examples of such China English vocabulary from the novel are provided in Table 1.

As Marvin Harris observed, Chinese culture is profoundly shaped by food—a theme clearly evident in the novel. China English terms often revolve around culinary elements, such as *moon cakes* and *boiled dumplings*. Moon cakes,

traditionally eaten during the Mid-Autumn Festival, symbolize reunion and are also used as offerings to ancestors and deities. Boiled dumplings, central to Spring Festival celebrations, carry cultural significance beyond mere sustenance, representing prosperity and family unity. Additionally, regional specialties like *kaoliang cake*, *nian gao*, and *Cho tofu* highlight China's diverse food culture—elements largely unfamiliar in Western contexts. Chinese creativity is also reflected in culturally specific objects designed for daily life and leisure, such as *mahjong*. Originally introduced abroad by early immigrants, mahjong remains a popular pastime in China. Through strategic translation, these culturally distinctive terms not only capture readers' interest but also facilitate deeper understanding of Chinese festivals and cultural practices.

Table 1 Terms of Material Life

Categories	Lexical Items
Transliteration	mah jong; tea, wonton, maotai, maodo
Transliteration+Paraphrase	Cho tofu, nian gao, chipao
Loan Translation	gold ingots, Chinese silver, torn rice paper, tiger-bone pads for aches, night soil, silk thread, silk dresses and jackets, custom-faded ivory silk gauze, an embroidery stitch, embroidery needle, bamboo lattice, bamboo shoots, chicken-feather ball, teacup, teapot, sateen Chinese dress, scrolls, moxa leaves, dark wood, long gown big hats; moon cakes, steamed dumplings, steamed fish, dan-dan noodles, rice noodles, dragon-well tea, hot frying oil, soy sauce, sweet boiled red beans, potstickers, boiled dumplings, sticky rice cake, kaoliang cake

4.1.2 Terms of addresses and names

4.1.2.1 Terms of addresses and persons

China has long been known as a land of etiquette, where forms of address carry significant social meaning. The careful choice of address terms reflects the relationship between speakers and conveys respect and social nuance. In the novel, Amy Tan introduces readers to authentic Chinese address forms, offering insight into traditional cultural values. These terms can be categorized into three types: one is the address terms used in different Chinese dialect like *Ha-bu*, which add not only exotic flavor but some fun or humour to the novel; another is those that are not used any more in current China, such as *Sister Momo*, *Tai-tai*, and *Sz Ma*, which can be found only in stories and preserved as a witness of the outdated conventions in Old China; the third is those bearing specific cultural or social connotations, such as, *Syin ke*, *Old Mr.Ma*, and *Syau ning*. The following Table 2 are terms of addresses and persons in China English from the novel:

Table 2 Terms of Addresses

Categories	Lexical Items
Transliteration	Baba, Ma, Mama, San Ma, Sz Ma, Wu Ma, Ha-bu, tai-tai, Aiyi, Sister Momo, Mochou, Lau Tai Po, chin wubing
Transliteration+Paraphrase	tang jie, Syau ning, Syin ke, Yiku, Danru, zibuyong
Loan Translation	Grand Auntie Du, Auntie Miao, Old Mr. Ma, Little Yu, Old Aunt, New Aunt and Uncle, Old Shoe Stink, herb doctor

For example,

Ex 1: She always called me *syin ke*, a nickname, two words that mean “heart liver,” the part of the body that looks like a tiny heart. [10]

The term *syin ke* used by heroine's mother bears a deep metaphorical meaning in Chinese more than what “heart liver” means in English. It is the metaphorical meaning in Chinese. It is well-known that heart and liver play an indispensable role in physical health. Thus, the Chinese parents employ *syin ke* to show their love as the children are as important as heart and liver to them.

4.1.2.2 Terms of places

Chinese place names often carry rich historical and cultural meanings, serving as markers of identity and memory. The use of these terms in the novel helps situate the narrative within specific socio-geographical contexts and reflects economic conditions of the time. Examples of such toponyms in China English are provided in Table 3.

Table 3 Terms of Places

Categories	Lexical Items
Transliteration	Chungking, Tientsin, Foochow, ningpo, soochow, yangchow, Hangchow-Wuchang, Chiao Chow, Hankow, Haiphong, Nanking, Huangpu, Shanghai, Yangtze, Changsha, Hong Kong, Kunming, Zhejiang, Julu, He De, San Ying, Chiao Chow, Guanshi, Kowloon, Canton, Tungting, Tsungming, Loyang, Kweiyang, Chenghuang Miao
Transliteration+Paraphrase	Sam Fook Trading Company
Loan Translation	Nine Dragon Guest House, Sorrowfree Lake, the Mouth of the River, the Shop of the

Gods, Ding Ho Flower Shop, teahouse, Water Dragon Restaurant, Green Lake, West Wall Gate, Little East Gate, South Wall Gate, Five Phoenixes Textile Trading Companies, Old East, Heaven's Breath, Bubbling Well Road

For example,

Ex 2: To **Chenghuang Miao**, where she said they sold a beauty tonic of crushed pearls. [10]

Chenghuang Miao is a temple for worshipping chenghuang gods. In ancient Chinese culture, “cheng” and “huang” were considered as the city defense tools. The people thought that there is a god in the old temple who could protect their families and harvest. Over hundred years, the old temple also sells some knick-knacks with local specialities.

4.1.3 Terms of folklore and customs

4.1.3.1 Terms of folk culture

Folk culture conveys the spirit and identity of a nation through its unique traditions, history, and artistic expressions. In the novel, numerous terms reflect China's diverse folk heritage, allowing Western readers to engage with authentic cultural concepts. These are compiled in Table 4:

Table 4 Terms of Folk Culture

Categories	Lexical Items
Transliteration	Yin, yang, Amitaba
Transliteration+Paraphrase	
Loan Translation	red banners, Buddhist ceremony, Chinese New Year, Small New Year, Big New Year, lunar new year, nuns, opera, Tiger year, red envelope, spirit money, paper jewelry, good-luck charm, wreath, lucky money, monkey dancing, coppers, twelve animals of the horoscope, play, cymbals, lute, cockfight, eunuch, red altar temple, mean expression, honoring ancestors, a fortune-teller, the luckiest fortune sticks

For example,

Ex 3: If a woman has too much **yin**, she draws a lot more **yang** from her husband. [10]

Yin and *yang* are fundamental and crucial concepts in *Book of Change*. Here, Tan elucidates the relationship between genders using the ancient Chinese philosophy of *yin* and *yang*, where female represents dark and negative aspects while male represents light and positive aspects. This philosophy is considered the foundation of Chinese culture and is key to understanding the dynamics of the universe.

4.1.3.2 Terms of marriage customs

Marriage customs in China encompass both marital models and ceremonial etiquette. These traditions have been passed down through generations, forming a complex system that reflects distinct cultural values and embodies a hallmark of Chinese civilization. Terms about marriage customs in China English from the novel are listed in Table 5:

Table 5 Terms of Marriage Customs

Categories	Lexical Items
Transliteration	
Transliteration+Paraphrase	
Loan Translation	matchmaker, concubine, second wife, third wife, fourth wife, fifth wife, Double Second, dowry, Old marriage customs, wedding sedan, a witness at wedding

For example,

Ex 4: She said he could take her as a **concubine**, marry a real wife later. [10]

To grasp the meaning of *concubine*, Western readers need to acquaint themselves with the marriage practices of ancient China. During that era, men were allowed to have multiple wives, known as *concubines*, who usually held lower social status. This enduring marriage pattern in China exerted a profound and lasting influence on Chinese society.

4.1.3.3 Terms of fairy tales

Fairy tales and mythological stories are deeply embedded in traditional culture, reflecting communal beliefs, moral values, and aspirations. Chinese folklore includes a variety of pragmatic deities, such as the Goddess of Mercy, the God of Literature, and the Money God. Related terms found in the novel are presented in Table 6:

Table 6 Terms of Fairy Tales

Categories	Lexical Items
Transliteration	
Transliteration+Paraphrase	Kwan Yin, Wen Ch'ang
Loan Translation	the Money God, God of War, Lady Sorrowfree, the Kitchen God, Lady White Ghost, the God of the Village, cowherd, weaving girl, Eight Immortals, talk to the devil, the next

world, crane bird, Nine Bad Fates

By titling the novel *The Kitchen God's Wife*, Amy Tan not only evokes the mystique of Chinese tradition but also underscores the protagonist's connection to cultural roots. When removed from their original context, these mythological figures gain new symbolic relevance. Tan reinterprets traditional legends, crafting a narrative marked by empowered, independent, and defiant female voices—thereby blending Chinese myth with contemporary American influence.

4.1.4 Terms of idioms and sayings

Chinese idioms and sayings embody history, culture and folk wisdom. Idioms are a special component of Chinese language and the embodiment of national flavor and rhetoric device. While some may seem illogical or absurd, old sayings have been embraced by generations and wield significant influence on societal norms and practices. In the novel, Tan creatively translates these idioms and sayings into English, infusing cultural depth. With them the characters in the novel become vivid in a special historical or cultural context, appealing to Western readers with an exotic flavor. Several examples can be found in the novel, see Table 7:

Table 7 Terms of Idioms and Sayings

Categories	Lexical Items
Transliteration	
Transliteration+Paraphrase	Jye shiang ru yi ends and odds and evens; First-Class Life for Your First Baby; Double-Happiness Wedding Triples Family Fortunes; Money Smells Good in Your New Restaurant Business; as a lesson that others could profit by; Ten thousand generations; Four splits, five cracks; Standard Five and Ten. Sweep away last year's dust and all bad feelings.
Loan Translation	Take even one sweet, and lose your whole life to bitterness. Eat forbidden candy and your stomach pops out. The sky doesn't last three good days; the land isn't level for even three inches. Don't strike a flea on a tiger's head. Open the door, you can already see the mountain.

Here are two examples given detailed description:

Ex 5: She traces her finger down one, then the other. "*Jye shiang ru yi*. This first word is 'luck, 'this other is another kind of luck, and these two mean 'all that you wish.' All kinds of luck, all that you wish." [10]

Ex 6: Take even one sweet, and lose your whole life to bitterness. Eat forbidden candy and your stomach pops out. [10]

The traditional idiomatic expression in Chinese *Jye shiang ru yi* in Example 5, which means "good luck and happiness to you", is used to express the speaker's best wishes to the listener. The old saying in the Example 6 is widely accepted in China that misusing opportunities or desiring what is beyond reach can disrupt fate. When a certain equilibrium is disturbed, a new equilibrium will be achieved at a new cost as seen in the expressions "lose your whole life to bitterness" and "your stomach pops out."

All in all, the indigenization of these terms is not simply dull translation of Chinese, but achieves a dramatic and arresting literary effect. While these four categories may not encompass all the China English lexis in the novel, they capture the essence of Chinese socio-cultural representations, serving as a valuable resource for those interested in understanding China English, Chinese culture, and social life in China.

4.2 Constructional Patterns of China English Lexis in *The Kitchen God's Wife*

In order to fully demonstrate the lexical characteristics of China English in the novel *The Kitchen God's Wife*, it is necessary to analyze them in terms of the translation strategies of borrowing words. Such systematic analysis of them will give readers an overall view of the characteristics of China English in the novel.

4.2.1 Transliteration

Transliteration means converting a word or phrase in another language in a different alphabet, without changing its form. Currently, there are two main systems used for transliterating Chinese borrowings. The older one is Wade-Giles, a Romanization system for Chinese. Before the adoption of Chinese Pinyin, many Chinese names of people and places were translated into English according to the Wade System. The other system, Pinyin, uses the Latin alphabet and is widely used today. Developed since the 1950s, Pinyin is the official transliteration of Chinese language. In the novel, Wade-Giles is applied more frequently as many of the stories are set in old China before the system of Pinyin is established. Terms of China English that are expressed in the way of transliteration in the novel are listed in Table 8:

Table 8 Transliteration Items

Categories	Lexical Items
Terms of material life	mah jong; tea, wonton, maotai, maodo
Terms of addresses and	Baba, Ma, Mama, San Ma, Sz Ma, Wu Ma, Ha-bu, tai-tai, Aiyi, Sister Momo, Mochou,

names	Lau Tai Po, chin wubing; Chungking, Tientsin, Foochow, ningpo, soochow, yangchow, Hangchow-Wuchang, Chiao Chow, Hankow, Haiphong, Nanking, Huangpu, Shanghai, Yangtze, Changsha, Hong Kong, Kunming, Zhejiang, Julu, He De, San Ying, Chiao Chow, Guanshi, Kowloon, Canton, Tungting, Tsungming, Loyang, Kweiyang, Chenghuang Miao
Terms of folklore and customs	Yin, yang, Amitaba
Terms of idioms and sayings	

Given the non-equivalence in culture, customs, and conventions between China and the Western world, it is possible that certain concepts exist in Chinese but cannot be directly translated into English. In such cases, Tan retains the original pronunciation in Chinese Pinyin to convey specific meanings, creating China English terms to bridge the lexical gap. This approach not only preserves the original language's flavor but also infuses the novel with exotic cultural elements. By maintaining the Pinyin of original terms, especially in terms of addresses, Western readers can experience the unique flavor and gain insights into Chinese culture. Moreover, the incorporation of numerous Chinese Pinyin terms in English text disrupts the flow of standard English, evoking a sense of unfamiliarity and novelty.

4.2.2 Transliteration plus paraphrase

Transliteration plus paraphrase means expressing terms of China English first by transliterating and then paraphrasing them in native English. In the novel, it is characterized by italicized Pinyin followed by a mark and the corresponding English explanation. The following terms highlight not only semantic difference between Pinyin and English but also collision of two different cultures. For foreign readers, unfamiliarity with these terms renders them meaningless without proper interpretation or rephrasing. Through this method, Tan prompts readers to reflect on the cultural disparities and aids in elucidating the cultural connotations embedded in the terms, see Table 9.

Table 9 Transliteration plus Paraphrase Items

Categories	Lexical Items
Terms of material life	Cho tofu, nian gao, chipao
Terms of addresses and names	tang jie, Syau ning, Syin ke, Yiku, Danru, zibuyong; Sam Fook Trading Company
Terms of folklore and customs	Kwan Yin, Wen Ch'ang
Terms of idioms and sayings	Jye shiang ru yi

For example,

Ex 7: I found out later that *sam fook* means “triple blessing” in old Cantonese, and according to my mother-or rather, her Hong Kong customers-*sam fook* sounds like a joke, like saying “the Three Stooges” [10].

Example 7 gives an instance which depicts an American's feeling toward the real language use of Chinese immigrants which can resonate with the readers as they could not sense the meaning of *sam fook* without the following English translation counterpart. Besides, the Chinese pinyin *sam fook* adds an exotic blend to the narrative so as to arouse the Western readers' interest in the further reading.

4.2.3 Loan translation

Besides transliterated borrowings, loan translation ones are also adopted. Many words and expressions of China English in the novel have been translated by borrowing native English directly, which are listed in Table 10:

Table 10 Loan Translation Items

Categories	Lexical Items
Terms of material life	gold ingots, Chinese silver, torn rice paper, tiger-bone pads for aches, night soil, silk thread, silk dresses and jackets, custom-faded ivory silk gauze, an embroidery stitch, embroidery needle, bamboo lattice, bamboo shoots, chicken-feather ball, teacup, teapot, sateen Chinese dress, scrolls, moxa leaves, dark wood, long gown big hats; moon cakes, steamed dumplings, steamed fish, dan-dan noodles, rice noodles, dragon-well tea, hot frying oil, soy sauce, sweet boiled red beans, potstickers, boiled dumplings, sticky rice cake, kaoliang cake
Terms of addresses and names	Grand Auntie Du, Auntie Miao, Old Mr. Ma, Little Yu, Old Aunt, New Aunt and Uncle, Old Shoe Stink, herb doctor; Nine Dragon Guest House, Sorrowfree Lake, the Mouth of the River, the Shop of the Gods, Ding Ho Flower Shop, teahouse, Water Dragon Restaurant, Green Lake, West Wall Gate, Little East Gate, South Wall Gate, Five Phoenixes Textile Trading Companies, Old East, Heaven's Breath, Bubbling Well Road red banners, Buddhist ceremony, Chinese New Year, Small New Year, Big New Year,
Terms of folklore and customs	lunar new year, nuns, opera, Tiger year, red envelope, spirit money, paper jewelry, good-luck charm, wreath, lucky money, monkey dancing, coppers, twelve animals of the horoscope, play, cymbals, lute, cockfight, eunuch, red altar temple, mean expression,

Terms of idioms and sayings	honoring ancestors, a fortune-teller, the luckiest fortune sticks; matchmaker, concubine, second wife, third wife, fourth wife, fifth wife, Double Second, dowry, Old marriage customs, wedding sedan, a witness at wedding; the Money God, God of War, Lady Sorrowfree, the Kitchen God, Lady White Ghost, the God of the Village, cowherd, weaving girl, Eight Immortals, talk to the devil, the next world, crane bird, Nine Bad Fates
	ends and odds and evens; First-Class Life for Your First Baby; Double-Happiness Wedding Triples Family Fortunes; Money Smells Good in Your New Restaurant Business; as a lesson that others could profit by; Ten thousand generations; Four splits, five cracks; Standard Five and Ten. Sweep away last year's dust and all bad feelings. Take even one sweet, and lose your whole life to bitterness. Eat forbidden candy and your stomach pops out. The sky doesn't last three good days; the land isn't level for even three inches. Don't strike a flea on a tiger's head. Open the door, you can already see the mountain.

What Tan wants to express by these English words is not their conceptual meaning but the associative meaning. Without certain background knowledge of Chinese society and culture, some of associative meanings don't make sense to foreign readers, which is particularly evident in the translation of idioms and sayings.

To sum up, these forms of linguistic expression not only create a special reading atmosphere for the text but also showcase the Chineseness of Tan's identity. Tan's deep understanding of dual cultures and her unique writing skills present to the world a singular and enigmatic portrayal of China, thereby enriching the English language and culture while fostering global literary diversity.

5 CONCLUSION

This paper offers a detailed sociolinguistic interpretation of the lexical characteristics of China English as evidenced in Amy Tan's novel *The Kitchen God's Wife*. The analysis demonstrates that the China English lexicon in the novel possesses semantic richness marked by cultural specificity and structural innovations arising from dual cultural influence. In terms of semantic features, the vocabulary shows pronounced Chinese influences within four key domains: material life, address and naming practices, folklore and customs, and idioms and sayings. Examining these meanings emphasizes the deep connections between language and cultural identity. Structurally, these terms are incorporated via three primary methods: transliteration, transliteration coupled with paraphrase, and loan translation. These strategies allow for a nuanced representation of Chinese cultural elements, illustrating the author's unique bilingual background and narrative technique.

The skillful use of China English lexis in *The Kitchen God's Wife* produces several notable effects. First, it contributes to an authentic and vivid depiction of life within a Chinese community. Second, it reflects the regional and historical context of China, providing glimpses into the economic conditions and social issues of the era. Third, it enhances character portrayal and emotional expression through dialogue and narration infused with Chinese linguistic nuances. Finally, it creates a distinctive language style that blends Chinese expressive depth with English communicative conventions, strengthening the novel's appeal in cross-cultural settings. This linguistic synthesis effectively portrays the cultural negotiation faced by Chinese immigrants in America—balancing tradition with assimilation.

In summary, *The Kitchen God's Wife* serves as a rich example of China English lexical practices. This study broadens the scope of Chinese American literary analysis and cultural translation studies, while also demonstrating the value of sociolinguistic approaches to literary China English. Nonetheless, as a qualitative study with limited scope, the conclusions remain somewhat subjective. Future research could adopt mixed-method approaches and expand into other linguistic aspects such as conversational structures and syntactic patterns.

COMPETING INTERESTS

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