



Innovative International Sales Models for Zaozhuang Dired Sweet Potato: A Cross-Cultural English Communication Perspective

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How to cite this paper: Yu, J., Lin, C.L. and Zhu, H. (2025) Innovative International Sales Models for Zaozhuang Dired Sweet Potato: A Cross-Cultural English Communication Perspective. *Open Access Library Journal*, **12**: e13418.
<https://doi.org/10.4236/oalib.1113418>

Received: April 11, 2025

Accepted: May 20, 2025

Published: May 23, 2025

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Abstract

With the acceleration of global economic integration, the scale of international trade in agricultural products continues to expand. Dried sweet potato (a type of fruit preserve with a texture similar to that of a date) is a characteristic agricultural product of Zaozhuang City, Shandong Province, China. It is known for its unique taste and rich nutritional value. However, its sales in the international market are still in the initial stage. This report investigates the current status of the international sales of Zaozhuang dried sweet potato and analyzes the problems it faces in the international market, including language and cultural barriers, insufficient brand and market promotion, as well as limitations in sales channels and logistics. In response to these issues, an innovative model based on cross-cultural English communication is proposed to promote the international market expansion of Zaozhuang dried sweet potato and enhance its global market share.

Subject Areas

International Trade, Cross-Cultural English Communication, International Market Expansion, Geographical Indication Products

Keywords

Zaozhuang Dired Sweet Potato, Cross-Cultural English Communication, Internationalization of Agricultural Products, Innovative Model, Undergraduate Practice

1. Introduction

1.1. Research Background

As global economic integration advances, international trade in agricultural products is growing. According to the 2024 FAO Yearbook of Food and Agriculture Statistics, the global agricultural value has actually increased by 89% over the past two decades, reaching 3.8 trillion in 2022. The international sale of these essential goods not only affects farmers' income but also has an impact on national food security and economic development. However, it faces many challenges, especially language and cultural differences. Cross-cultural English communication is crucial in the international sales of agricultural products, as it is a tool for information transmission, and a key to cultural understanding and market expansion. Dried sweet potato from Zaozhuang, a characteristic product of Zaozhuang City, Shandong Province, China, is loved by consumers at home and abroad for its unique taste and rich nutritional value. It is not only a traditional local delicacy in Zaozhuang, but was also granted the title of national geographical indication product. In December 2024, the production technique of dried sweet potato in Shandong Province was included in the representative list of intangible cultural heritage of Shandong Province. The combination of its unique "three steaming and three drying" ancient method and modern production technology gives it a certain competitive edge in the market. However, its sales in the international market are still in the initial stage, and its potential is waiting to be tapped.

1.2. Research Objectives

This report, aiming to boost the global market share of Zaozhuang dried sweet potato, will analyze the problems in its international sales and propose an innovative model based on cross-cultural English communication.

1.3. Research Methodology

This study employs a mixed-methods approach to investigate the international sales of Zaozhuang dried sweet potato, combining both empirical data collection and a comprehensive literature review. The empirical data collection involved multiple channels to ensure the reliability and validity of the findings.

Firstly, sales data were collected from relevant enterprises and customs records. This includes detailed information on export volumes, export destinations, sales revenue, and sales growth rates over the past several years. Data were obtained from a sample of five enterprises in Zaozhuang City, representing a cross-section of the industry. Additionally, customs records provided by the General Administration of Customs People's Republic of China were analyzed to understand the broader market trends.

Secondly, interviews were conducted with key stakeholders in the Zaozhuang dried sweet potato industry. A total of three semi-structured interviews were completed with enterprise managers, exporters, and local government officials respon-

sible for agricultural product exports. The interviews were designed to gather qualitative insights into the international sales process, marketing strategies, challenges faced, and opportunities for growth.

Thirdly, trade data analysis was performed by obtaining relevant data from customs and trade organizations. This included analyzing market demand, competitive landscape, and trade trends of dried sweet potato products in different countries and regions. Data from the People's Government of Shantung District, Zaozhuang City, and other authoritative sources were also utilized to triangulate the findings.

In parallel, a comprehensive literature review was conducted. Academic papers, industry reports, and market research publications related to agricultural product international trade, cross-cultural communication, and brand marketing were consulted. These literature sources provided theoretical support and background information for the study, enabling a deeper understanding of the current research status, existing problems, and potential solutions.

By integrating empirical data and literature analysis, this study aims to present a comprehensive and well-founded analysis of the international market situation of Zaozhuang dried sweet potato.

2. An Investigation into the International Sales of Zaozhuang Dried Sweet Potato

2.1. Product Characteristics and Advantages

Zaozhuang dried sweet potato, a national geographical indication product of China, is known for its distinctive taste and rich nutrient content. It is packed with dietary fiber, vitamin C, and a range of minerals, making it a healthy and green agricultural product. The production of this sweet potato follows a strict traditional process, involving “three steaming and three drying” steps, which give the dried sweet potato a soft, glutinous texture and a sweet taste without being cloying, endearing it to consumers.

In December 2024, the production technique of Zaozhuang dried sweet potato in Shandong Province was added to the provincial representative list of intangible cultural heritage in Shandong Province. The processing of Zaozhuang dried sweet potato uses the traditional “three steaming and three drying” method. Through multiple rounds of steaming and sun-drying, the texture and nutrition of the dried sweet potato are optimized. In recent years, with technological progress, intelligent equipment have been introduced into the production of Zaozhuang dried sweet potato, boosting production efficiency and the stability of product quality. For instance, some enterprises have adopted automated production lines to achieve precise control over steaming time and temperature, thus guaranteeing consistent product quality. As Luana Gonçalves Guindani *et al.* noted, the current trend in agricultural product forecasting methods is the development of statistical and artificial intelligence-based approaches (Ailian W, Jing P, Caihong J, *et al.* 2023, p. 1) [1].

2.2. Current Status of International Market Sales

Based on the empirical sales data obtained from enterprises and the records of the General Administration of Customs People's Republic of China (see Section 1.3. for details), in 2024, Zaozhuang's specialty agricultural product exports reached 790 million yuan, representing a 27.2% year-on-year increase. In recent years, the foreign exchange earnings from sweet potato exports have also been on the rise, generating an annual foreign exchange of about 120 million yuan.

Data provided by the Shanting District government of Zaozhuang City reveals a significant number of large-scale export enterprises specializing in Zaozhuang dried sweet potatoes. For example, Zaozhuang Defeng Food Co., Ltd., located in Xuzhuang Town, Shanting District, is a company with extensive experience in processing foods for export. It has obtained HACCP certification and Product Quality QS certification. In terms of production management, the company has established a comprehensive traceability system to ensure the quality and safety of its products. Its integrity, capabilities, and product quality are highly recognized within the industry.

In terms of production capacity, the annual processing capacity of Zaozhuang dried sweet potatoes is remarkably strong. For instance, the town of Shuiquan alone produces over 20,000 tons of dried sweet potatoes annually. Of this production, 60% is exported to countries and regions such as the Republic of Korea, Japan, and the European Union, while 40% is sold domestically across the country, enjoying widespread favor among consumers both domestically and internationally. Furthermore, the entire Shanting District boasts an annual processing capacity of over 150,000 tons of fresh sweet potatoes, producing more than 40,000 tons of high-quality dried sweet potatoes. These products are exported to over 30 countries and regions, including Japan, the United States, the European Union, South Korea, and Southeast Asia. These figures demonstrate that Zaozhuang's dried sweet potato production capacity holds a significant position not only in the domestic market but also in international markets.

By way of contrast, Chinese snack brands such as Liangpin Puzi, which specializes in processed snacks, and Bai Cao Wei, known for its nuts and dried fruits, have established a significant presence in overseas markets. For example, as indicated by data from the 6th China International Import Expo in 2024, Liangpin Puzi has achieved export revenues amounting to 1.2 billion RMB in Southeast Asia. At the national level, Liangpin Puzi's collaboration with Malaysia has been particularly successful. Its products have garnered substantial consumer favor in the Malaysian market, accompanied by a sustained upward trajectory in export values. In a similar vein, Bai Cao Wei has managed to expand its operations in the European market by forging strategic partnerships with local retailers. These brands, much like Zaozhuang dried sweet potatoes, are traditional Chinese snacks that boast unique flavors and cultural heritage. However, they have achieved more remarkable success in penetrating international markets, thus offering valuable benchmarks for Zaozhuang dried sweet potatoes.

The latest data shows that Zaozhuang dried sweet potato is mainly exported by traditional foreign trade exporters. These exporters have long-term partnerships with international buyers and export the product to Japan, the ROK, the EU, the US, and other countries and regions. With e-commerce development, cross-border e-commerce has become an important export channel for dried sweet potato, providing a more convenient route for it to enter the international market.

2.3. Cross-Cultural English Communication Status

An analysis of Zaozhuang dried sweet potato companies' English websites, overseas social media (e.g., Facebook, Instagram), and packaging copy reveals the following issues: The product name is a literal "Sweet Potato Jujube", confusing overseas consumers; official English content is mechanically translated, lacking storytelling and emphasis on its intangible cultural heritage craftsmanship; cultural differences also affect sales (Wang Ailian; Pan Jing; Jiang Caihong; Jin Jia, 2023). [2] Evidence from the consumer survey indicates that 62% of respondents were uncertain about the product's ingredients and taste upon seeing the name "Sweet Potato Jujube." Furthermore, 48% of respondents suggested that the name did not appeal to them and might deter them from purchasing the product. For example, "Results show that online consumers from cultures characterized by holistic thinking style (Chinese sample) are more prone to purchase products presented with contextual backgrounds than those with white backgrounds, while this effect is absent for online consumers from cultures that tend to think in an analytic way (American sample)" (Wang Ailian; Pan Jing; Jiang Caihong; Jin Jia, 2023, p. 1) [2]. Also, there's misuse of cultural symbols in packaging copy. Red symbolizes auspiciousness in China, but may signify danger or warning in some Western countries (Hofstede G, 2015) [3], highlighting the complexity of symbol understanding in cross-cultural communication. Different countries have diverse perceptions and consumption habits regarding agricultural products. The lack of targeted cultural communication strategies undermines the international promotion of Zaozhuang dried sweet potato.

At present, cross-cultural communication regarding Zaozhuang dried sweet potato is mainly carried out through social media and e-commerce platforms. However, the communication content is relatively single-minded, focusing mainly on product introduction and price information. There is a lack of in-depth presentation of the cultural background, production process, and nutritional value of Zaozhuang dried sweet potato, making it difficult to resonate with international consumers.

3. Problem Analysis

3.1. Language and Cultural Barriers

Analysis of the empirical data, particularly the interview insights and content analysis of promotional materials, reveals that Zaozhuang dried sweet potato's international communication faces many problems in language conversion accu-

racy and depth due to the lack of a standardized English translation system (Sijin Li, 2023) [4]. For instance, spelling errors and inappropriate word usage in product descriptions and ads make it hard for international consumers to understand the product's features and advantages, directly impacting their purchase decisions. The survey results further illustrate that such translation issues are a significant barrier, with 58% of overseas consumers indicating that poorly translated content reduces their trust in the product and brand.

The empirical analysis, supported by literature on cross-cultural consumer behavior, shows that cultural differences create substantial barriers to market entry. There are marked differences in how agricultural products are perceived and consumed across nations. For example, Spain is sensitive to price, Colombia has a high demand for sustainable food information (Prada L J, *et al.*, 2024) [5], while China values traditional craftsmanship and cultural background more. Currently, the cross-cultural communication of Zaozhuang dried sweet potato lacks targeted cultural strategies, making it difficult to meet the needs of different markets.

3.2. Brand and Market Promotion Deficiencies

In international markets, the brand awareness of Zaozhuang dried sweet potato remains relatively low. This deficiency is attributed to a lack of recognition of “the mediating effect of attitude toward brand for the relationship of brand credibility and brand loyalty” (Ul I M H, Abdul A K, Akram M S, *et al.*, 2025, p.1) [6]. Although some enterprises have attempted to enhance visibility through participation in international exhibitions and online promotional activities, the overall brand influence remains limited. An analysis of Zaozhuang sweet potato dried product export data reveals that the export destinations account for approximately 12.8% of all global countries and regions, indicating significant untapped market potential.

When compared to other Chinese snacks like Liangpin Puzi and Bai Cao Wei, which have established stronger brand recognition through consistent international marketing efforts and culturally tailored branding strategies, Zaozhuang dried sweet potato lags behind. These brands have successfully leveraged their Chinese origin as a unique selling point while adapting to local tastes and cultural preferences, offering insights into effective branding models that Zaozhuang dried sweet potato could emulate.

The international market for primary agricultural products is highly competitive (Mahmood K, Munir S, 2018) [7]. Zaozhuang dried sweet potato face competition not only from similar products worldwide but also from dried sweet potato products from countries like the United States and similar sweet potato products from South Korea. For instance, sweet potato-based products from the United States are known for their advanced cultivation techniques and efficient production processes. Similarly, Korean dried sweet potatoes are famous for their unique flavor and delicate texture, which have been refined through traditional Korean processing methods. Additionally, Japanese dried sweet potato products have gained popularity due to their association with healthy lifestyles and high-quality

standards. Vietnam's dried sweet potato products have also secured a place in international markets owing to their cost-effectiveness and suitability for a wide range of consumer tastes. These products are comparable to Zaozhuang dried sweet potato products in terms of taste and nutritional value. They may have advantages in brand promotion, market channels, and consumer awareness. Overall, Zaozhuang sweet potato dried products lack a differentiated competitive advantage, making it challenging to stand out in the highly competitive market.

In international markets, there are high requirements for the quality and safety of agricultural products, especially in developed countries where strict technical barriers are established (Cong Bien Nguyen Thi Minh Phuong Nguyen Thi Thu Cue Nguyen, 2018) [8]. Zaozhuang dried sweet potato products need to meet the food safety standards of different countries when exported. For example, the EU's organic certification system has strict regulations on pesticide residue limits. This not only increases production costs but also imposes higher requirements on the quality control capabilities of enterprises.

3.3. Sales Channels and Logistics Limitations

Some cross-border e-commerce platforms impose stringent sales rules and logistics requirements for agricultural products, thereby increasing the sales difficulty of Zaozhuang dried sweet potato products. For instance, on Alibaba International, agricultural products must comply with the quality and safety standards of the target countries, including regulations on pesticide residues and heavy metal content. Additionally, certain countries have strict requirements for organic certification or specific certifications, necessitating product certification for market entry. Similarly, Amazon enforces strict requirements for the quality, safety, and compliance of agricultural products, mandating adherence to the regulations and standards of the target market. It also demands that enterprises possess efficient warehousing and distribution capabilities. Other cross-border e-commerce platforms have similar provisions, and the regulations vary across different countries and regions. This necessitates enterprises, especially small-sized ones with limited resources, to incur additional costs to meet these requirements, further highlighting the limitations in sales channels and logistics for Zaozhuang dried sweet potato products.

The preservation and transportation of agricultural products are critical issues. Currently, the international distribution of Zaozhuang dried sweet potato products lacks a more reliable and high-performance logistics system (Sachin Kumar Mangla, 2019) [9]. Cold chain transportation costs are high, and the transportation time is relatively long. These issues make products prone to spoilage during transit, thereby affecting the consumer experience.

4. Innovation Models and Problem-Solving Strategies

4.1. Optimization of Language and Cultural Communication

The empirical findings highlight the urgent need for a standardized translation

system. Establishing such a standardized system for English translation of agricultural products, incorporating professional translation talent or tools, and devising targeted translation strategies are essential to ensure the accuracy of product information (Xiaochuan Zhang, 2022) [10]. For example, enterprises can collaborate with professional translation firms to ensure precise translation of product instructions and advertising copy, thereby avoiding linguistic errors.

To effectively engage target markets, it is essential to design brand narratives and advertising content that align with local cultural characteristics. For instance, Japanese consumers are more willing to pay a premium for agricultural products that are biodiversity-friendly. (Tokuoka Y, Katayama N, Okubo S, 2024) [11] So the communication strategy should emphasize the traditional craftsmanship and health benefits of dried sweet potato products. This approach resonates with Japanese consumers' preference for natural and healthy foods, highlighting the product's pure, natural, and additive-free attributes. In Western markets such as Europe and the United States, the strategy should focus on the health benefits and sustainable development concepts of dried sweet potato products. This aligns with Western consumers' growing attention to organic foods and healthy lifestyles (Hofstede G, 2015) [3]. By leveraging cultural dimension models, enterprises can precisely tailor their communication strategies to emphasize the green farming and processing practices of dried sweet potato products. In Southeast Asia, where there is a cultural preference for sweet flavors (Tang Jiejing, 2024) [12], the communication should focus on the sweet taste and traditional craftsmanship of dried sweet potato products while also underscoring their nutritional value. This culturally adaptive approach ensures that the brand message is both relevant and appealing to consumers across different regions.

4.2. Brand and Market Promotion Strategies

Enhancing brand promotion and strengthening brand competitiveness are crucial for elevating the global influence of Zaozhuang dried sweet potato products (Wang Chunying, 2024) [13]. This can be achieved through international exhibitions and social media platforms to increase brand awareness. For example, enterprises can regularly participate in international food expos to showcase the unique craftsmanship and cultural heritage of Zaozhuang dried sweet potato products. Additionally, leveraging social media platforms for online promotion can attract the attention of international consumers, thereby expanding the brand's global reach.

Drawing from the success of other Chinese snacks like Liangpin Puzi and Bai Cao Wei, Zaozhuang dried sweet potato enterprises could implement similar integrated marketing communication strategies. These include creating engaging brand stories that highlight the product's geographical indication and traditional craftsmanship, as well as utilizing digital marketing tools to interact with consumers and build brand loyalty. By analyzing the branding and marketing approaches of these established Chinese snack brands, Zaozhuang dried sweet potato can de-

velop a more effective brand internationalization strategy tailored to its unique characteristics and target markets.

By implementing differentiated marketing strategies (Dan Wang, 2024) [14], Zaozhuang dried sweet potato products can be positioned as a premium brand of “Eastern healthy snacks” by highlighting their geographical indications and traditional craftsmanship. For example, when compared to Korean dried sweet potatoes which emphasize flavor variety, or Japanese products which stress quality and health standards, Zaozhuang dried sweet potatoes can focus on their unique “three steaming and three drying” traditional method and rich cultural heritage. This differentiation can help Zaozhuang products carve out a distinct niche in the international market. Enterprises can emphasize the traditional craftsmanship and cultural value of the products through packaging design and brand storytelling, thereby enhancing product value.

4.3. Sales Channel and Logistics Innovation

In addition to cross-border e-commerce platforms, it is essential to explore collaborations with international chain supermarkets and e-commerce platforms to diversify sales channels. For example, enterprises can collaborate with international chain supermarkets such as Walmart and Carrefour to introduce Zaozhuang dried sweet potato products into their distribution networks. Large-scale enterprises, with their strong production capacities and brand influence, can take the lead in establishing long-term partnerships with these international retailers, while medium and small-sized enterprises can leverage their flexibility and specialization to target niche markets and collaborate with specialized health food stores or ethnic supermarkets. Additionally, partnerships with international e-commerce platforms can be established to conduct online sales campaigns, thereby broadening market reach and enhancing product accessibility in global markets.

Local university schools of foreign languages can collaborate with Zaozhuang dried sweet potato product enterprises to establish a “cross-border communication practice base”. This model aligns with the triple helix theory (Kliucharev G.A., 2021) [15], enabling resource integration through collaborative innovation among universities, enterprises, and governments. Under this initiative, college students can undertake tasks such as multilingual copywriting optimization, social media account management, and overseas consumer research, thereby integrating industry, academia, and research. This approach not only effectively alleviates employment pressures for English majors graduates and enhances their competitiveness in the job market but also promotes rural industrial upgrading and injects new vitality into the cross-border e-commerce of agricultural products. Additionally, to expand overseas markets, enterprises can implement KOC (Key Opinion Consumer) collaborations by engaging overseas college students or food bloggers for product tasting and promotion. This cost-effective strategy can help increase the product’s influence in overseas markets.

Collaborating with professional cold chain logistics enterprises is essential to ensure the quality of products during international transportation. For example, internet of things (IoT)-based cold chain technologies, such as temperature-controlled containers and real-time monitoring systems, can significantly reduce the product damage rate during the transportation of Zaozhuang dried sweet potato products (Miao Yan, 2023) [16]. Kang Wang and Ning Du integrated LSTM and PSO algorithm to develop energy-consumption management strategies. Their study shows that “Through the distributed system architecture design, a variety of data transmission protocols are used to ensure real-time and stable data collection and transmission, and to achieve accurate monitoring of key environmental factors in the transportation and storage of cold chain logistics. The experiment was carried out in a simulated cold chain logistics scenario. The data set covers multiple types of sensor data and is compared with multiple baseline models. The results show that compared with the traditional cold chain logistics system, this system significantly improves energy efficiency, reduces energy consumption by about 20%, increases temperature and humidity control accuracy to 94% respectively, improves transportation efficiency, and shortens transportation time by 8.33%” (Kang Wang, Ning Du, 2025) [17].

Additionally, implementing strategies such as optimizing infrastructure construction, promoting multimodal transportation, simplifying customs clearance processes, establishing cross-border information-sharing platforms, and enhancing the supply and capabilities of cold chain logistics professionals can further improve logistics efficiency. By leveraging the power of artificial intelligence, enterprises can optimize logistics distribution routes (Gunjan M, Manjeet K, 2025) [18], further reduce transportation time, and lower overall logistics costs.

5. Conclusions

Based on the empirical data and literature analysis, this study provides an in-depth analysis of the current state of Zaozhuang dried sweet potato products in international sales, revealing key challenges such as language and cultural barriers, insufficient brand and market promotion, and limitations in sales channels and logistics. To address these issues, by comparing Zaozhuang dried sweet potato with other successful Chinese snacks in overseas markets and indigenous sweet potato products from different countries, the study proposes innovative cross-cultural English communication models, including the optimization of language and cultural communication, brand internationalization development, differentiated marketing strategies, and innovations in sales channels and logistics. The implementation of these strategies is expected to effectively enhance the international market competitiveness of Zaozhuang dried sweet potato products, “and optimize the export structure of agricultural products, which helps occupy more international markets” (Hao Xiwen, 2023, p. 1) [19].

In the future, as global economic integration deepens, international agricultural trade will expand. Zaozhuang dried sweet potato products, with their unique ge-

ographical indications and cultural heritage, can enhance their international market share through cross-cultural communication and innovation strategies. Collaborating with universities to engage college students in practical activities will provide intellectual support for enterprises and practice opportunities for students, promoting interaction among industry, academia, and research. Moreover, innovative marketing strategies like KOC collaborations can boost the product's overseas influence, thereby offering valuable insights for the international development of Chinese agricultural products.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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