

*Original Paper*

# Can Translation Evolve? Translation Errors of Chinese-to-English Tourism Promotional Materials from Eco-Translatology Perspectives

Tony Lee<sup>1\*</sup> (Li Tianhao)

<sup>1</sup> Faculty of Social Science and Humanities, The National University of Malaysia, Bangi, Malaysia

\* Tony Lee (Li Tianhao), E-mail: [tonyth\\_lee@outlook.com](mailto:tonyth_lee@outlook.com)

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## **Abstract**

*Chinese tourism has been revised since the Covid-19 quarantine policy was abolished. Tourism institutions are going to continue to attract inbound and international tourists by using tourism promotional materials. Tourism commonly seems like an intercultural communication process. Therefore, translating Chinese tourism promotional materials into English with good quality should be highlighted, such as leaflets, brochures, websites, etc. However, while promotional discourse in the tourism industry has been developed for many years, previous studies indicated that some English translations of tourism promotional materials fail to achieve very promotional efficacy, or worse, leave a negative impression on international tourists. This paper aims to focus on analyzing the translation errors of tourism promotional materials and improve them from Eco-translatology perspective, namely Three-dimensional Transformation. Finally, the findings argue that the essential reason for the translation errors is ascribed to the lack of persuasive tourism skills and the non-consideration of Anglophone tourists' characteristics.*

## **Keywords**

*Tourism Promotional Materials, Chinese-to-English Translation, Eco-translatology, Translation errors, Anglophone Tourists*

## **1. Introduction**

Tourism is indispensable for the economies of countries (Pratama, 2021). The number of inbound tourists in China has been increasing since the year 1978 (Jia, 2020), which made an impact on Chinese economic growth (Ryan & Gu, 2009). In addition to being a crucial sector for economic growth, the

tourism industry also plays a significant role in promoting Chinese culture abroad as a means of intercultural transmission (Liu, 2020, p. 88). After Opening up and Reform, China's national strength and international status have rapidly increased, and tourism aims to meet the national strategy of telling China's stories well and making China's voice heard (Yang, 2021). Tourism Promotional Material (TPM), as a linkage-advertising material (Woodside, 2000), is underlined in the national pride strategies (Yang, 2021). They are utilized to meet the national strategy of telling China's stories well and making China's voice heard (ibid, 2021). It varies from brochures, leaflets, posters, flyers, postcards, and websites, supporting sales of tourism products (Sulaiman, 2019) and extending culture to locals and international tourists, expediting the Chinese voice-out process. In the tourism promotion process, the target is the non-specialized reader who is likely to collect and compare several materials before deciding what to visit and where to go (Ira Torresi, 2010), the purpose of the TPM is to ultimately convert readers and viewers to actual tourists (Sulaiman, 2021). Therefore, the TPM is created to entice potential tourists to purchase the holiday, namely, the product of the destination (Almeida-García, Domínguez-Azcue, & Mercadé-Mele, 2017) Therefore, to trigger an appealing destination image to the international tourists, TPM must be translated (Sulaiman, 2021).

Numerous tourism promotional materials are translated from Chinese to English (Ma, 2014). In general, extending Chinese culture is the priority of the voice-out process but is multifaceted, and it might be difficult to translate Chinese culture-specific items into TPM (Meixin, 2022; Zhang, 2012). Although TPM has developed for many years in China, there is a deficiency in translating Chinese culture into TPM, with more word-for-word and literal and fidelity translation. It appears that there is a presumption that since tourism is related to pleasure and not anything about "serious" or life-threatening action, like medicine-translation or law-translation, it does not call for much precise work. In contrast, it necessitates expertise and sensitivity in a wide range of cultural domains such as history, architecture, art, gastronomy, and so on (Woodward-Smith, 2019). The failure of TPM translation not only fails to monitor the efficacy of the promotion, resulting in unfavorable and low standard translation quality, but also has a negative impact on the international development of scenic spots (Li, 2018). Studies demonstrate that the importance of translation rewriting and the creation of intercultural communication is a necessary component of the international dissemination of Chinese stories, and translation studies researchers should pay close attention to the issues that arise during the intercultural process (Yang, 2021). However, Yang's study only examines intercultural communication and translation strategies, rather than providing an in-depth explanation of the relationship between cultural studies and translation studies. Although, as David Katan demonstrated, translators or interpreters are prepared to assess the distinctions between the gaze of the Inside Reader and the Outside Reader from cultural studies (Katan, 2016), there is a limitation in articulating the relationship between the translator, target reader, and commissioner during the tourism advertising process. Therefore, a new translation theory to analyze tourism translation, Eco-translatology, is first stated by Newmark and developed by Gengshen Hu. One of the principles in the theory is Three-Dimensional

Transformation. The linguistic, cultural, and communicative translation approaches are based on systematic studies on translation practice, while language, culture, and communication have always been highlighted by translation theorists (Hu, 2020, p. 159). In other words, when translating tourism promotional materials, the translator is apt to carry out adaptive selection according to different stages or orders of language, culture, and communication (ibid). This leads to the study's research questions:

- What are the sensitive perceptions Anglophone tourists hold in tourism promotional materials?
- What are the translation errors in tourism promotional materials?
- What are the translation strategies for translating Chinese tourism promotional materials into English?

## 2. Review of the Past Studies

### 2.1 Characteristics of Anglophone Tourists

This study focuses on the Chinese and English language of tourism, and one of the consequences is the investigation of tourists from English-speaking countries, namely, the tourism texts are expected to tailor to the Anglophone people and their conventional style content. Many recent studies (jiangbo, 2010; Xiao, 2023) have shown that Western people would be attracted by the appealing, clear, and well-organized text while Chinese is poems and historical idioms. These statements make a relationship between tourists' expectation and their imagination of the actual action in their tourism journey. To further examine the role of actual imagination in tourists' actions, Sulaiman (2018) proposed the anti-tourism discourse and highlighted the notion of action which is the motivational keyword for anglophone tourists (p. 5). Kefala's comprehensive review of tourism advertising translation concluded that, Anglophone culture people tend to believe that they are independent and more willing to explore their destinations by themselves (Kefala, 2021). With these in mind, before identifying the translation errors, it is paramount to evaluate the characteristics of the target audience, the people from Anglophone culture, their values, identity, and discourse.

### 2.2 Research on Tourism Promotional Discourse

Tourism studies boast a fruitful research history around the world. The topic categorizes the list of cultural tourism, geo-tourism, sustainable tourism, wine tourism, tourism gaze, national tourism etc. It is notwithstanding that tourism and promotion cannot be discussed separately. As Dann stated, the language of tourism is the language of modernity, promotion, and consumerism, with the features of extensiveness and persuasiveness (Dann, 1996). It is combined with tourism and cultural studies, reproducing a tourism discourse different from the tourism language (Dann, 2005). While discourse combined power with knowledge (Foucault, 1980), tourism discourse is a fusion of power and knowledge to present culture, value, and identity to tourists, the Other. Tourism promotion is to provide tourists with the destination's natural beauty and cultural richness that is typical for the culture, rather than the similar of McDonaldization or Disneyfication. Luxury, romantic, and nostalgia are referred to the tourism promotion to the Other as well (Tsiotsou & Ratten, 2010). Tourism promotional materials

are a form of advertising in the field of marketing (Middleton, Fyall, & Morgan, 2009, p. 316). It includes brochures, leaflets, posters, flyers, postcards, and websites, to support the sales of tourism products (Sulaiman, 2019). It is concluded that tourism promotional discourse is a combination of articulating the destinations of culture, marketing, and human perception.

### *2.3 Research on Translation of Tourism Promotional Materials*

Tourism promotional materials are a hot academic topic among many translators and researchers. Kelly Dorothy (1998) was one of the first to classify the tourists' text, one is informational, and the other is advertised for a tourist's destination (p. 35). Valdeón Roberto (2009) has studied extensively tourism advertising, using Fariclough's consumerism model to develop tourism advertising translation. Meanwhile, the translation quality and errors of tourism texts have been studied extensively (Jiangbo, 2010; Wang, 2012; Muñoz, 2012; Agorni, 2016). One of the most cited studies is that of Sulaiman Zain, who sees the relationship between cultural differences and tourism promotional materials and testifies to the Cultural-Conceptual Model to mitigate cross-cultural misunderstanding, miscommunication, and misinterpretation (Zain & Wilson, 2018). However, the majority of previous studies on tourism promotional materials translation are based on the perspectives of Western translation studies, little research has conversed their interests to the Eastern world. English translation of tourism promotional materials in Asia, especially in China, has gained increasing attention in academics. The Three-Dimensional Transformation of linguistic, cultural, and communicative aspects is the typical translation principle. According to Eco-translatology, translation is a dynamic process of adaptation and selection, a multidimensional transformation process of adaptive selection at different levels and different aspects (Xue, 2022). In Xue's research, there are frequently three translation errors in tourism promotional materials from the cultural dimension: no translation; literal translation, and word-for-word translation. Although Wang and Zhan interpret cultural translation issues from the perspective of translator subjectivity, showing that the cultural function of the translation, and the target reader can determine whether the translation's cultural function is equivalent to the source text (Wang & Zhan, 2019).

### *2.4 Translating Culture-Specific Items in Tourism Industry*

To be able to trigger an appealing destination image, TPMs must be translated (Sulaiman, 2021). When translating culture into TPM, as Agorni (2018) proposed, cultural diversity, rather than identity, is at the basis of the tourist offer (p. 254). "Translators will have to find a balance between an adaptive, naturalizing strategy of translation, which makes the foreign destination accessible to Outsiders, and the necessity to maintain a certain authenticity flavor" (ibid, p. 254). While Jiangbo and Ying make a statement that the target text needs to offer the receiver such useful information as the location, area, facilities, and features, and it is supposed to serve as a recommendation or persuasion (Jiangbo & Ying, 2010). It provides a direction for translating Chinese culture with specific purposes. Another direction is presented by Ira Torresi:

Cultural stereotypes are a vital asset for short promotional genres such as advertisements (Eco, 2002).

This does not only refer to negative or positive stereotypes that can be associated with a given nationality (as the ones mentioned above) or group of people but to all pre-logical assumptions that we usually take for granted and expect to see confirmed in the media as well as in our daily experience (Torresi, 2021, p. 39).

Unfortunately, there is a lack of research on cultural-specific items of stereotypes translated into tourism promotional materials in China. This paper will analyze the effect of translating cultural-specific items of stereotypes into tourism promotional materials.

### *2.5 Theoretical Framework*

Eco-translatology paradigm was proposed by Hu Gengshen in 2001. It is based on the ecological knowledge of Easterners and Darwin's theory of adaptation and selection. The paradigm emphasizes the idea of ecological holism and conducts systematic investigations into the translation ecology, text ecology, and translator-community ecology as well as the relationships and interactions among the Three-Dimensional Transformation: linguistic, cultural, and communication. Under-Eco-translatology, tourism translation serves not only as a way of communication for different languages but also as a carrier during cultural transmission. (Xiao, 2023, p. 169) To avoid mistranslating the original text from the perspective of the translated culture, the translators should pay attention to the cultural difference, and abide by adapting to the entire cultural system, while converting the source language (Li, 2018). To effectively achieve the purpose of translating tourism publicity materials, translators should base on the theory of ecological translation adaptation and the selection and start from the perspective of spreading Chinese culture and realizing the expected discursive functions (Xiao, 2023, p. 169). While Xu (2021) proposed a new idea from Eco-translatology: shaping cultural image to attain the target of communicative ability. And Xue (2022) also developed-Eco-translatology, highlighting the post-event penalty and translator responsibility in the translator-community. These demonstrations lay a solid foundation for translators who are positioned as considerable cultural mediators to translate cultural-specific items within a given context.

## **3. Method**

### *3.1 Research Design*

This study was conducted with a textual analysis method, focusing on the translation of TPMs in tourism websites. Primary data will be collected from the three official government websites, including [www.meet-in-shanghai.net](http://www.meet-in-shanghai.net), [www.shenzhentour.com](http://www.shenzhentour.com), and [www.Travelchina.org.com](http://www.Travelchina.org.com). Some translation errors were categorized from the websites for the textual analysis. A small translation project will be introduced in the result with the parallel text and the proposed together, using back translation to verify the quality of the translation work.

### *3.2 Data Collection*

The data in this study of textual analysis were collected from websites and literature will be mainly chosen, including [www.meet-in-shanghai.net](http://www.meet-in-shanghai.net), [www.shenzhentour.com](http://www.shenzhentour.com) and [www.Travelchina.org.com](http://www.Travelchina.org.com)

which is the official website for tourism promotion in China (Qian, 2016), and articles from online libraries. Columns are chosen from the introduction of the destination. There are more than two language versions (Chinese and English) on the websites, and both versions are translated version, except the re-write version. This data collection lasts around 7 working days.

### *3.3 Data Analysis*

The research used the textual analysis method to analyze the primary data. The textual analysis method used by the researcher refers to Sulaiman (2013). The three websites are the official tourism promotional website in China (Qian, 2016), and papers from the online library. There are more than two language versions (Chinese and English) on the websites, and both versions are translated versions, except the rewritten version. In the analysis process, the source text was collected from the websites (Chinese version), the parallel text was translated by word-for-word rendition, the original target text was also collected from the websites (English translated version), and with my suggested target text that is revised through the principle of Three-Dimensional Transformation.

## **4. Results & Discussion**

### *4.1 Translation Errors from Linguistic Dimension*

#### *4.1.1 Spelling Error*

Source Text: 现在景区内天涯石、海角石、南天一柱、爱情石、平安石五大名石。

Parallel Text: The attraction has the rock of Tianya, the rock of Haijiao, South Sky Pillar, the Love Rock, and the Peace Rock.

Original Target text: There are five famous rocks in the attraction, namely, the rock of Tianya, the rock of Haijiao, South-ern Heaven Rock, the Love Rock and the Rock of Blessings.

Suggested Target Text: There are five famous rocks in the attraction, namely, the Rock of Tianya, the Rock of Haijiao, The Southern Rock Pillar, the Love Rock, and the Rock of Blessings.

Discussion: The word southern is separated as “South- ern”. Although it fully contains the characters in a word and has no impact on the understanding of tourism, it still leaves a negative impression on the tourists.



The most popular tourist site in Sanya, Tianya Haijiao, is located 23 kilometers in the southwest of Sanya. It has won a world-renowned reputation with its charming tropical seashore landscape, time-honored and unique history and culture, and colorful ethnic customs. The site earned its name from the Chinese characters "Tianya" (the edge of the sky) and "Haijiao" (the rim of the sea) carved on two giant rocks at the seashore. There are five famous rocks in the attraction, namely, the rock of Tianya, the rock of Haijiao, South- ern Heaven Rock, the Love Rock and the Rock of Blessings. Entertainment facilities such as sea-bathing areas, fishing spots and yachts are also available.

**Figure 1. Introduction of Sanya, Tianya Haijiao from [www.Travelchina.org.com](http://www.Travelchina.org.com)**

#### 4.1.2 Omission

Source Text: 天山占新疆全区面积的三分之一，拥有茂密的森林，广阔的草原，众多的山系，是新疆“生命的摇篮”。其中博格达峰以海拔5445米的挺拔身姿立于群山丛中，与另外两座海拔分别为5287米和5213米的山峰构成了著名的“雪海三峰”，成为新疆的象征。2013年被列入“世界自然遗产”名录。

Parallel Text: Tianshan Mountain covers one-third of Xinjiang Province. It has a thick forest, extended grassland, and various hills, and called as Cradle of Xinjiang. Within it, Bogda Peak stands out among the hills with an altitude of 5445 meters, along with other two hills respectively 5287 meters and 5213 meters. The three hills are formed by Xuehai Three Hills, the symbol of Xinjiang, which is titled in the World Natural Heritage List.

Original Target text: Tian Shan incorporates an area that is one-third the size of Xinjiang, boasts thick forests, broad grasslands, and numerous mountain systems, and is known as Xinjiang's "cradle of life". Bogda Peak within the mountain range at an altitude of 5,445 meters towers over the range and is collectively known as the "Three Snow Sea Peaks" alongside two other peaks at 5,287 and 5,213 meters, which is a famous symbol of Xinjiang.

Suggested Target Text: Tian Shan incorporates an area that is one-third the size of Xinjiang, boasts thick forests, broad grasslands, and numerous mountain systems, and is known as Xinjiang's "cradle of life". Bogda Peak within the mountain range at an altitude of 5,445 meters towers over the range and is collectively known as the "Three Snow Sea Peaks" alongside two other peaks at 5,287 and 5,213 meters, which is a famous symbol of Xinjiang and chosen into Natural World Heritage Sites in 2013.

Discussion: The promotional discourse, Natural World Heritage Sites that is beneficial to attract the target readers in the source language is omitted in the target text. Although Katan (2009) agreed that using omission to translate cultural words, Natural World Heritage Sites is a well-known institution (James R. Allan et al., 2017) to persuade potential tourists to visit. Therefore, omissions here are

accredited to a translation error.

#### 4.2 Translation Error from the Cultural Dimension

##### 4.2.1 Cultural-Specific Items

Source Text: 5A 级景区; 4A 级景区

Parallel Text: 5A level scenic spots; 4A level scenic spots

Original Target text: 5A grade; 4A grade

Suggested Target Text: 5 Stars Scenic Spot; 4 Stars Scenic Spot

Discussion: In the perception of Western tourists, they have no idea of the 5A grade or 4A grade tourist attractions. Likewise, European tourism institutions prefer to use the 5 Star rating system to evaluate a scenic spot. The cultural difference should be underlined in the translators' consideration.

##### 4.2.2 No Translation

Source Text: 军车免费

Parallel Text: Free parking for military vehicles

Original Target text: Military vehicles without charge

Suggested Target Text: Blank /

Discussion: Some source texts are redundant to translate from Chinese to English. This public sign in the tourist destination only targets the Chinese military, let alone international tourists. This translation arises the thinking: is an English translation of this trademark appropriate or required? Will vehicles from other militaries travel to China? Are foreigners' cars in China going to have military licenses?

#### 4.3 Translation Error from Communicative Dimension

##### 4.3.1 Literal Translation Error

Source Text: 海棠区位于三亚市东部，是三亚市的东大门。这里有一片享有“国家海岸”美誉的海湾——海棠湾。海棠湾依山傍海、风光秀丽、海水湛蓝、沙滩洁白、椰林连片成荫、拥有 22.4 公里的优美海岸线

Parallel Text: Haitang District is in the east of Sanya. It is the east gate of Sanya. There is a “national coast” bay here---Haitang Bay. Haitang Bay near to the hill and sea, has the beautiful scenic area with the crystal sea water, and white beaches along the shady coconut grove, and it has 22.4-kilometer beautiful coastline.

Original Target text: Haitang District, located in the east of Sanya City, is the east gate of Sanya. Haitang Bay enjoys a reputation of the “national coast”. Haitang Bay is situated at the foot of a hill and beside the sea, has spectacular scenery, crystal blue water, white beaches, shady coconut grove, and a 22.4-kilometer beautiful coastline.

Suggested Target Text: Located in the east of Sanya City, Haitang District is the gate of the city. It boasts the “National Coast” with spectacular views: white beaches and coconut palm groves along, forming the beautiful 22.4-kilometer coastline.

Discussion: Sometimes literal translation may cause confusion and damage the acceptability of the target texts (Jiangbo & Ying, 2010). In the above example, it is redundant to translate the adjective



phrases, such as near to the hill and sea, and shady coconut grove. To achieve the communicative purpose, these expressions are the default information that needs no translation into English, but in Chinese, they are a metaphor of parallelism to express spectacular views.

The translation errors will refer to one of the principles of Eco-translatology, post-*evet* penalty. It is also a metaphor, referring to the judgment and disposition of the target text after the translation activity. The lower standard translation will not be accepted by target readers (western tourists) for many years. In other words, the translation fails to persuade tourists, finally, it will be replaced by other translations. As Hu (2020) called ‘elimination of the weak’ (p. 155), it refers to the translation environment’s penalty to translation assignment and the translator, functioning as a way of self-discipline from the perspective of translator-centeredness, then translation begins to evolve themselves.

## 5. Conclusion

A qualified tourism translation serves not only as a means of cultural dissemination but also as a way of intercultural transmission without any linguistic errors. Due to differences in natural environments, social systems, religious beliefs, customs, beliefs, etc., language expressions with cultural characteristics also differ greatly. Tourism translators must translate with a high sense of responsibility, considering the source culture and the target culture, and coordinate the relationship between the principles of functional equivalence and cultural factors. In particular, English translation of Chinese tourism promotional materials are expected to apply the theories of Eco-translatology, where most source texts are locally made, in accordance with the local translation perspectives and finally evolve naturally and internationally. This study lay a foundation for future research in translating tourism promotional materials from the Three-Dimensional Transformation Theory. It implies that future scholars would analyze the translation quality of tourism promotional materials from the other theories of Eco-translatology, including translator-community, adaptation and selection with the quantitative method to testify to the relationship between cultural-specific items and other tourists’ perceptions. In so doing, the in-depth analysis helps to formulate a well-organized translation quality reference and guidebook for the tourism promotional department before publishing the materials.

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