

Original Paper

Study on National Image Construction and International Communication in *CHINA ON THE MOVE* Amid Deconstructionism and Constructivism

PANG Ya-Qi¹ & CUI Dan^{2*}

¹ Undergraduate student of School of English, Jilin International Studies University, Changchun, China

² Doc of Literature, Professor, Dean of Institute of International Language and Culture, Leader of Comparative Literature and Cross-culture Discipline, Jilin International Studies University, Changchun, Jilin, China; School of Foreign Languages, Yanbian University, Yanbian, Jilin, China; Postdoc of Literature of School of English, Beijing Foreign Studies University, Beijing, China

* CUI Dan, Corresponding Author, E-mail: summerelephant@126.com

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Abstract

National image documentary is a key part in shaping a country's brand, fostering cultural exchange. However, China has faced challenges in presenting a dynamic and multidimensional national image on the global stage. In recent years, China has intensified its international communication efforts, leveraging various media formats to portray a more comprehensive image. The paper critically analyzes the contradictions inherent in the construction of national image and its overseas translation and communication, focusing on the biases of logocentrism and egocentrism. Taking China on the Move as a case study and examining its production, characterization, narrative, and translation strategies to summarize patterns and practices from a series of high-quality Sino-foreign co-produced documentaries. The analysis explores how the deconstructionist strategy of decentralization contributes to the joint-shaping of national image, and how an emphasis on marginalization reflects broader societal structures through the lens of ordinary lives. The deconstructionist translation strategy underscores the translator's active role and the importance of "creative rebellion". Conversely, the constructivist strategy elucidates the underlying logic of China's image for international audiences, promoting empathetic communication by seeking common ground while acknowledging differences. The constructivist translation strategy also imposes necessary limitations on "creative rebellion" to ensure coherence in the translation process.

Keywords

national image construction, joint-shaping, deconstructionism, constructivism, translation and communication

1. Introduction

The study of China's national image construction, along with its overseas translation and communication, constitutes an interdisciplinary field that integrates insights from philosophy, psychology, communication studies, as well as translation theory. This integrative approach is essential to understanding the processes involved in the creation and global dissemination of national identity. In recent years, the advent of big data and the proliferation of new media have significantly influenced the role of documentaries as a pivotal medium in constructing and reflecting national images. Compared to traditional platforms such as newspapers, literary works, and radio, documentaries uniquely blend authenticity with artistic expression, providing a compelling visual impact and fostering emotional engagement. Their effectiveness in cross-cultural communication, combined with diverse narrative approaches, renders them a vital instrument for international communication. This paper employs *China on the Move* as a case study to examine the application of Jacques Derrida's deconstructionist strategies and Jean Piaget's constructivist approaches within the domains of documentary production, narrative techniques, interview dynamics, and translation practices. The objective is to analyze how promotional documentaries contribute to national image formation and examine the dissemination strategies that address the challenges posed by international communication, which remains substantially influenced by Western media. By doing so, the study aims to facilitate cultural exchange between China and Western countries, while also contributing to a more nuanced understanding of China, countering prevalent stereotypes. The literature informing this analysis encompasses research on national image construction methodologies, deconstructionism, constructivism, cognitive development theory, and medio-translatology.

2. Generalization of *China on the Move*

China on the Move is a two-season documentary series, with its 1st season co-produced by Shanghai Media Group (SMG) and the UK's Lion Television, while the 2nd season was a collaborative effort between SMG and Discovery Church International (DCI). The documentary was broadcast across multiple international television channels, including Sino Vision in the United States, ODC in North America, BFC in Italy, and ATV SPIRIT in Hungary. Additionally, it was distributed on overseas digital platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and Shanghai Eye, where it garnered widespread acclaim from global audiences. Adopting a Sino-foreign co-production model, the documentary takes on an international perspective, utilizing vivid personal narratives and extensive interviews to portray a

multifaceted, contemporary image of China. The series addresses five key areas—economy, governance, science and technology, ecology, and livelihoods—while also emphasizing significant initiatives such as poverty alleviation and pandemic response. The documentary has received several prestigious awards, including Best Documentary Short at the 13th Chicago Independent Film Festival and the Gold Award for Television Documentary at the 44th Annual Telly Awards in the United States. Moreover, the French version of the 2nd season was featured at two prominent offline events: the inaugural Paris China-France Forum at UNESCO headquarters and the “China Audiovisuelle Exhibition” organized by the National Radio and Television Administration in Paris.

3. Literature Review

Research on the methods of constructing China’s national image has largely concentrated on the conventional dichotomy between self-shaping and other-shaping. These studies typically characterize self-shaping as a positive force, while other-shaping is perceived as detrimental to the formation of China’s national image. Although self-driven dissemination efforts are somewhat constrained by cognitive biases and various external factors, it is widely recognized that China is making concerted efforts to enhance its self-shaping capacities and transform the predominance of other-shaping within the global media landscape. However, this perspective is increasingly regarded as one-dimensional and subjective, as it overlooks the fact that China’s international image construction still operates within the broader context of a relatively weaker cultural communication system. In response, scholars such as Shao Peng, associate dean and professor at the College of Humanities, Zhejiang University of Technology, have underscored the positive potential of joint-shaping strategies in the international promotion of Chinese culture. These scholars contend that by integrating the controllability of self-shaping with the expansive dissemination channels of other-shaping, it is possible to mitigate the limitations of both approaches.

Furthermore, studies of cognitive development theory suggest that self-shaping often leads to “egocentric bias” (Samuel et al., 2019, p. 3), affecting both message senders and recipients. This bias is influenced by various factors, including “physiological similarities” (Wu Menghui et al., 2022, p. 138; Muto et al., 2018) and “cultural differences between East and West” (Wu Menghui et al., 2022, p. 138; Zhai et al., 2021), all of which shape China’s international image to varying degrees. To minimize egocentric bias, it is crucial to adopt a “visual perspective taking (VPT)” (Michelon & Zacks, 2006, p. 327).

Research on deconstructionism and constructivism has primarily focused on the core tenets of these theories. Deconstructionism is not simply a method of breaking down and analyzing components. Rather, it is a strategy—specifically one of anti-logocentrism that emphasizes *decentralization* and *marginalization* (Du Xiaozhen, 2000, p. 95). One of deconstructionism’s defining features is its

openness, as evidenced by the dissolution of binary oppositions and the concepts like *différance* (Wang Quan, 2004, p. 69). This deconstructionist strategy permeates the entire documentary. Conversely, Jean Piaget's constructivism emphasizes the interpretation of current situations through existing experiences, evoking empathy in audiences and thereby mitigating egocentric bias. This constructivist approach underpins the documentary's narrative structure.

Medio-translatology (Xie Tianzhen, 1999), a sub-discipline of comparative literature, focuses on linguistic variation within translation studies. This field has expanded beyond traditional translation concerns, addressing factors such as the reading habits, cognitive styles, and ideological contexts of target-language audiences, which directly influence the effectiveness of international communication. Current translation practices often prioritize the act of translation itself, overlooking the constraints imposed by these external factors (Xie Tianzhen, 2014, pp. 5-7). For example, studies on translating subtitles for documentaries aimed at international audiences are popular among scholars, but they do not figure out the fact that overseas viewers often find subtitles disruptive to the viewing experience. The importance of the translator's subjectivity and "creative rebellion" as fundamental principles should be emphasized in cross-cultural communication (Xu Jun, 2003, p. 8). At the same time, constructivist translation theories provide necessary constraints on deconstructionist strategies, ensuring that creative liberties remain within appropriate boundaries (Lü Jun, 2005, pp. 36-37). This balance further validates the rationality of combining deconstructionist and constructivist strategies in the translation and communication of *China on the Move*.

While there has been limited research on *China on the Move*, existing studies have largely focused on cross-cultural communication strategies, multimodal discourse analysis, narrative techniques, and the role of media rituals in constructing national identity. Han Guozhen et al. (2024) explored the "7W" model in cross-cultural communication, analyzing the communication subjects, content, and audience, and concluded that documentaries should cater to international audience preferences, adopt an international narrative perspective, and lower the barriers to global dissemination. Mu Yujia (2023) conducted a multimodal discourse analysis using visual grammar, examining the representational, interactive, and compositional aspects of *China on the Move*, highlighting the positive impact of visual construction on cross-cultural communication. Yang Yingying et al. (2024) examined narrative choices in the 2nd season of the documentary, focusing on topic selection, narrative strategies, structure, and perspective, and emphasized the importance of co-productions considering international audience preferences, finding common cultural ground, and adopting foreign perspectives to enhance credibility and facilitate acceptance by overseas audiences. Zhan Weizhen et al. (2022) discussed how media rituals create national identity across temporal and spatial dimensions, offering insights into how Chinese promotional films could utilize media rituals to strengthen national identity.

Overall, research on *China on the Move* has been fragmented, lacking a comprehensive analysis of the philosophical and psychological frameworks underpinning the documentary's strategies. This study seeks to fill that gap by providing a macro-level examination of the documentary as a whole.

4. Strategies for National Image Construction

4.1 Approaches to National Image Construction

The construction of a country's international image typically encompasses both "self-shaping" and "other-shaping" approaches. Self-shaping refers to the proactive efforts of a country to create and project its image, positioning itself as the primary agent of communication. In contrast, other-shaping transpires when a country's image is passively constructed by external actors, often other nations (Liu Zhen, 2013, p. 106). A critical aspect of this process is the identity of the individuals or groups involved in image-shaping activities, as their identity significantly affects the audience's capacity to relate and identify with the projected image. Historically, China's international image has been largely shaped by external forces, particularly through the lens of Western countries, with the United States assuming a leading role. Western media that dominate over 90% of global news dissemination (Yan Wenbin, 2016, p. 17), have largely controlled the narrative. This media monopoly, akin to monopolistic market structures, tends to impede the evolution of narratives, as the absence of external checks and balances frequently culminates in a stagnation of perspectives and a violation of communicative equity. Within this unilateral narrative framework, China's image has progressively become one-dimensional, biased, and stereotyped—a consequence of sustained monopolistic dominance. According to a survey by the Pew Research Center conducted in April 2024, 81% of Americans reported a negative perception of China, marking the highest percentage recorded since the survey's inception.

Most Americans hold an unfavorable view of China

% who have a(n) ___ opinion of China

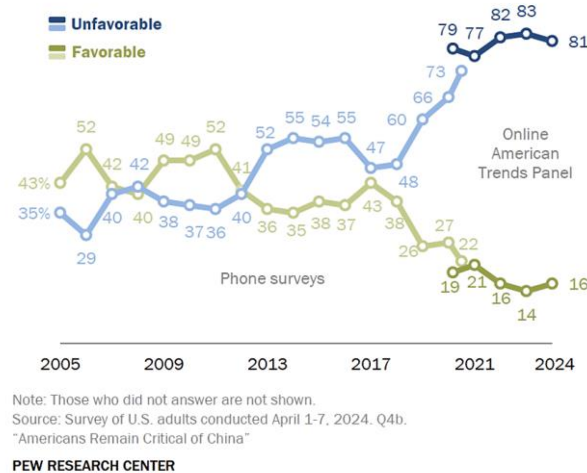


Figure 1. Survey on opinion of China

(From Pew Research Center, April 30, 2024)

4.2 Constraints of Logocentrism in National Image Construction

China has long sought to rectify Western misconceptions through self-driven efforts to shape its international image. However, owing to the information asymmetry engendered by the media monopoly, these initiatives have attained only limited success. Additionally, China's focus on constructing its image solely from its own perspective has struggled to disrupt the prevailing information flow patterns from high-density to low-density regions, and at times, has even yielded unintended negative consequences. "It has been argued that China has been unable to shed its image of an 'international propagandist [that has been] inherited from the years past'" (Ho, 2021, p. 94).

Given complex international factors, it is understandable that China, for a time, concentrated on self-shaping while resisting external influences. This approach, shaped by logocentric thinking, is evident in practices such as the addition of subtitles to documentaries, exclusive reliance on domestic media for dissemination, and the presentation of exclusively positive interviews with national experts. These actions illustrate the limitations imposed by logocentrism.

Logocentrism, a concept introduced by German philosopher Ludwig Klages in the 1920s, emphasizes the primacy of logos in philosophical systems, forming the core of Western metaphysics. A key feature of logocentrism is its reliance on binary oppositions, such as male and female, truth and falsehood, wherein one side typically dominates. Within the context of national image construction, self-shaping and other-shaping are treated as binary opposites, with self-shaping regarded as central and original, whereas other-shaping is deemed secondary and marginal.

4.3 Deconstructionist Strategy

China on the Move diverges from conventional approaches to national image construction by incorporating deconstructionism, as the production team employed innovative strategies and communication techniques to transcend the logocentric model typically used in international promotion. Deconstructionism, introduced by French philosopher Jacques Derrida in the 1960s, critiques the structuralism and logocentrism inherent in Western metaphysics, challenging binary oppositions and centralism while emphasizing marginalized individuals and groups. The documentary utilizes deconstructionist concepts such as *différance* and *supplementarity* to make self-shaping and other-shaping complementary, thereby dissolving the subjective-objective dichotomy in national image construction. As Sino-foreign co-productions increasingly dominate China's international communication efforts, deconstructionist strategies have become increasingly prevalent.

For instance, China Central Television (CCTV) Documentary Channel co-produced in partnership with *Big Pacific* with Natural History New Zealand, and *Speed Kills* with the Smithsonian Channel and South Africa's EARTH TOUCH. Both documentaries employ nonlinear narrative techniques, rejecting traditional chronological structures in favor of fragmented timelines and juxtaposed scenes or themes. This non-conventional structure challenges the audience's expectations of linear storytelling, prompting active engagement in constructing meaning from the fragmented content. Similarly, *Winter Gold*, co-produced with the Dutch Insight TV, reinterprets the symbolic meanings of "winter" and "gold medal" by focusing on the unique appeal of winter sports in China and the athletes' journeys, thereby expanding these concepts beyond seasonal or competitive contexts. In *Smart China: Start Up Revolution*, co-produced by the China International Communication Center and the UK's Meridian Line Films, the entrepreneurial ecosystem in China is explored through the perspectives of entrepreneurs, investors, and scholars. This multi-perspective approach challenges the limitations inherent to singular narrative, encouraging viewers to consider diverse viewpoints.

4.3.1 Decentralization in Deconstructionist Strategy

In documentaries, visual footage offers the most immediate impact on the audience, with the identities of characters playing a pivotal role in evoking emotional resonance. In selecting character shots and interview subjects, the footage is categorized into self-shaping (Chinese participants), other-shaping (foreign participants), and joint-shaping based on the identities of the interviewees (group dynamics). This categorization is accomplished using a combination of keyframe extraction techniques and descriptive statistical analysis.

4.3.2 Application of Deconstructionism in Character Portrayal

In the 2nd season of *China on the Move*, British director Arthur Jones emerged from behind the scenes for the first time to engage directly with the audience. By gathering diverse perspectives and conducting on-site investigations, he portrayed a favorable image of China's economy. The 2nd segment,

which centers on the economy, examines how China balances its domestic and international markets, sustains high-quality economic growth under the dual pressures of environmental concerns and trade conflicts, and explores its potential to inject new vitality into the global economy. The documentary features 269 character shots in total, with 125 focusing on Chinese individuals (approximately 46%) and 78 showcasing foreign individuals (some 28%). These character portrayals, serving as a crucial visual communication instrument, directly correspond to the concepts of self-shaping and other-shaping, wherein Chinese and foreign individuals representing each approach, respectively.

4.3.3 Application of Deconstructionism in Selecting Interview Subjects

While self- and other-shaping are widely acknowledged as two primary methods of national image construction and have been extensively analyzed in academic discourse, they do not the entirety of possible approaches. Deconstructionist strategies blur the boundaries between these two methods, organically merging them to produce a third, often overlooked approach—joint-shaping. This strategy offers a more “moderate” method for the construction of national identity. In the *Economy* segment of the documentary, 66 instances feature both Chinese and foreign individuals together, representing approximately 26% of the total shots. When other- and joint-shaping are combined as non-first-person perspective methods, they account for 54% of the documentary, while first-person perspectives constitute 46%. By strategically arranging the identities and appearances of individuals or groups in these shots, the documentary fosters a sense of identity among international audiences, thereby reducing ideological resistance in cross-cultural communication.

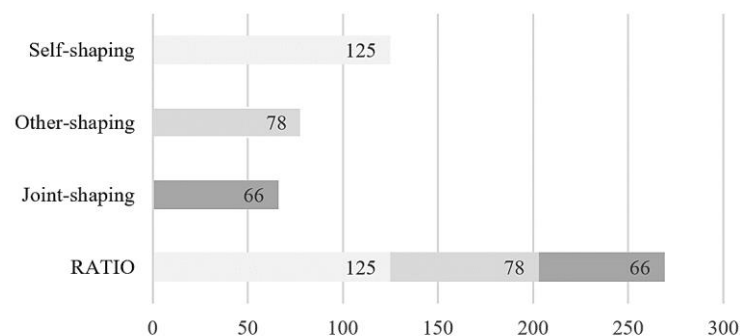


Figure 1. The Types of Figure Shots for National Image Shaping (S2E02)

The figure above illustrates the frequency and distribution of interviews from various perspectives in the *Politics* segment of *China on the Move*. According to the statistics, interview content is directly cited 34 times: 15 citations from foreign interviews (other-shaping), 9 from Chinese interviews (self-shaping), and 10 from interactive interviews (joint-shaping). The frequency distribution of these three shaping methods creates an “inverted trapezoid” pattern in the figure.

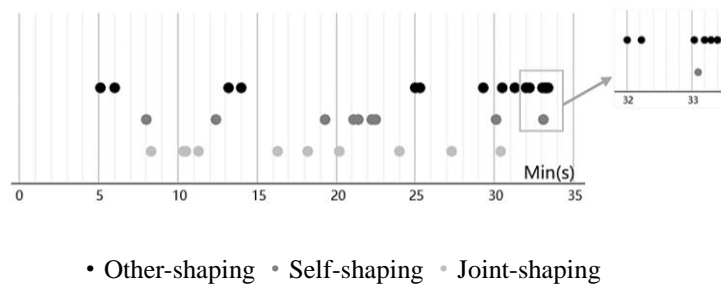


Figure 2. The Arrangement of Interviews from Different Perspectives (S2E01)

Figure 2 illustrates the distribution of self-shaping, other-shaping, and joint-shaping interviews across different time dimensions in S2E01. The horizontal axis represents the duration of the documentary. By employing frame-capture techniques, the first frame in which interviewees appear in each type of interview is pinpointed, thereby revealing their distribution throughout the entire documentary. The frequency and distribution of foreign interviews correspond with the upper base of the inverted trapezoid, spanning the longest duration. The documentary introduces its first interview at 5:10, featuring Western scholar Daniel A. Bell discussing his perspective on China's meritocratic political system, and concludes at 33:37 with John Ross, Former Director of Economic & Business Policy for the Mayor of London, providing a comprehensive assessment of China's political system. Consequently, the documentary begins and ends with an other-shaping approach. Of the 15 foreign interviews cited, 11 are situated in the final ten minutes, while the remaining 4 appear within the first ten minutes. The production team strategically employs the primacy and recency effects (Ladins, 1957) by positioning foreign interviews at the outset to create a "primacy effect" that shapes overseas viewers' initial impressions of China's image (Ma Yan, 2009, p. 62). Furthermore, the "recency effect" reinforces the audience's memory of the high-frequency other-shaping content at the end of the film, making it more impactful than the self-shaping segments in the middle. This symmetry from beginning to end deepens the connection with international audiences and reinforces their sense of identification.

Therefore, self- and joint-shaping gradually unfold like a scroll throughout the documentary, with Chinese and interactive interviews alternating to propel the narrative forward. As a more moderate approach, joint-shaping occurs with a frequency and distribution corresponds to the lower base of the inverted trapezoid, spreading more evenly than the other two methods. This relatively subtle joint-shaping method circumvents the perception of excessive self-promotion while preserving objectivity and neutrality (Shao Peng, 2020, p. 119). On a broader level, the documentary itself, as a Sino-foreign co-production, exemplifies the joint-shaping approach. By targeting shared denominators in storytelling, it enables the audience to feel as though their own stories are being conveyed, thus forging a connection between the Chinese narrative and the viewers, which is vital for achieving

optimal communication effects (Shao Peng, 2018, p. 13).

China on the Move employs the deconstructionist concepts of *différance* and *supplementarity* to alternate and the integration of the three shaping methods in character shots and interviews. By mitigating egocentric bias, the documentary presents a comprehensive, and objective portrayal of a multidimensional, vivid, and authentic image of China to its audience.

4.4 Marginalization in the Deconstructionist Strategy

Two fundamental aspects of the deconstructionist strategy are the decentralization of focus and emphasis on marginalization. The documentary achieves decentralization through its production choices, shot selection, and the diversity of interview subjects. In terms of character roles and content, it strategically highlights marginalization.

Conventional approaches to constructing a national image frequently focus on portraying China from a macro perspective, emphasizing economic growth and showcasing the nation's development and contributions, while downplaying its challenges. Although understandable, this macro-level portrayal could make it difficult for ordinary people to emotionally connect with such distant narratives. For many, these large-scale presentations feel too remote; they are more interested in learning about daily life and personal stories from foreign lands than hearing content resembling a *State of the Union Address*. Moreover, a sole focus on positive aspects may risk being perceived as propaganda. *China on the Move* adopts a strategy of emphasizing marginalization, reflecting China's broader image through the everyday experiences of ordinary people (petty narratives). Instead of relying on grand narratives, the documentary foregrounds the challenges China has faced and the solutions implemented, replacing realism's grand narratives with postmodern, engaging stories.

Differences in political systems and ideologies have long posed sensitive issues and obstacles in the international communication of national images. Nevertheless, *China on the Move* integrates elements of the superstructure into the everyday lives of ordinary individuals. For instance, it recounts the story of Zi Yang-Ping, a Jino ethnic doctor from the Jino Mountain Township Health Center, who also served as a member of the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC). Her village, once on the migration route of wild Asian elephants, suffered annual damage to houses and crops. After conducting field visits, gathering local feedback, and listening to opinions, Zi submitted an "elephant proposal" during the 2022 Two Sessions, which was eventually adopted and implemented. Consequently, the government began compensating residents for damages caused by wild animals. That year, CPPCC members like Zi, submitted 6,000 proposals, all of which were addressed or processed within the legally mandated timeframe. Through the story of a Jino ethnic doctor and a group of wild elephants, *China on the Move* introduces international audiences to the concept of *the whole-process of people's democracy*, illustrating how China's political system, *socialism with Chinese characteristics*, functions in operates.

5. Constructivism Strategies for National Image Construction

5.1 Reasons for Adopting Constructivist Strategies

In the context of global communication of China's national image, conflicts between the constructed image and foreign audiences' preconceptions could lead to resistance. *China on the Move* addresses this by acknowledging the challenges faced by China, rather than solely promoting its achievements. It aligns the narrative with the concerns of foreign audiences, using these tensions to subtly guide viewers in reconstructing China's image. This approach reflects Jean Piaget's theory of constructivism, which emphasizes that knowledge and problem-solving are actively constructed through interpreting new situations in light of existing knowledge and experience.

5.2 Principles for Adopting Constructivist Strategies

"Effective communication requires adopting the perspective of others; however, we often make errors by relying on our own subjective experiences to predict others' reactions" (Kelley & Jacoby, 1996, p. 173). This tendency, known as egocentrism bias, constitutes a primary cause of communication barriers and failures in social interactions (Wu Menghui et al., 2022, p. 179). *China on the Move* applies deconstructionist strategies to address egocentrism bias. Despite China's efforts to mitigate this bias in constructing its national image, effective communication remains a bidirectional process. A collaborative study by Michigan State University, the University of Chicago, and Indiana University analyzed 104,365 adults from 63 countries, revealing that individuals across individualistic societies tend to exhibit lower levels of empathy compared to those from collectivist societies (Chopik et al., 2017, pp. 8-22).

Additionally, cultural comparisons between East and West indicate that individualistic societies, which emphasize independence, generally foster lower empathy than collectivist societies that promote interdependence (Markus & Kitayam, 1991, pp. 247-248), which presents a cross-cultural communication challenge for both the national image construction of China and the understandings of audiences. The long-standing imbalance in cultural information flow between East and West reinforces entrenched knowledge and experiences, posing challenges for some foreign audiences to fully recognize China's evolving international image, even when presented with factual content in the documentary. To address this, *China on the Move* adopts a constructivist strategy, engaging with international concerns and clarifying the logic behind China's current achievements.

5.3 Application and Effects of Constructivism

The stereotypes of China, propagated by Western media, tend to deepen as individuals mature. It is fact that the national images are formed mostly in childhood (Boulding, 1959, p. 122). Given that, the process of constructing China's national image is essentially an address of pre-existing stereotypes. However, imposed images are fragile by comparison with those which are deeply internalized (Boulding, 1959, p. 122). It is urgent to shift strategies in content selection and narrative during the

process of constructing the national image.

5.3.1 Content Selection

China on the Move adheres to the principle of “the globalization of local media and the localization of global media” (Michael, 2019, p. 188), integrating global values, Western culture, and contemporary elements into the construction of China’s national image. “By employing universal communication techniques, the documentary interprets its culture and core principles, leveraging international platforms to convey China’s stories, solutions, and models, aligning with global trends and promoting its culture” (Shao Peiren & Shen Jun, 2017, p. 73). In selecting content, it incorporates global challenges such as human rights, gender equality, climate change, and desertification to showcase China’s contributions to the world, balancing its distinct characteristics with global values.

5.3.2 Narrative

In its narrative, the documentary applies a storytelling technique that contrasts with the monotonous rhythm typical of conventional documentaries. By interweaving conflict and resolution, it effectively combines the “record” elements of documentary filmmaking with the “narrative” aspects of feature films (Li Zhongzhi, 2016, p. 82), resulting in a dynamic and engaging storyline. Empathy functions as a catalyst in the constructivist approach, encouraging foreign audiences to actively engage in constructing China’s image. “While telling stories with facts is essential, effective communication techniques are equally important. These techniques allow for skillful and precise delivery of information, engaging the audience emotionally and fostering strong empathetic communication” (Shao Peng, 2020, p. 119).

China’s poverty alleviation efforts stand as a prominent “national card”, highlighting its significant contribution to global poverty reduction. Over an eight-year period, China successfully lifted 98,990,000 people out of poverty by the end of 2020 (from *Poverty Alleviation: China’s Experience and Contribution*), becoming the 1st country to achieve the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and leading the world in the number of people lifted out of poverty. This achievement has been recognized by the United Nations and offers a “Chinese solution” to other countries.

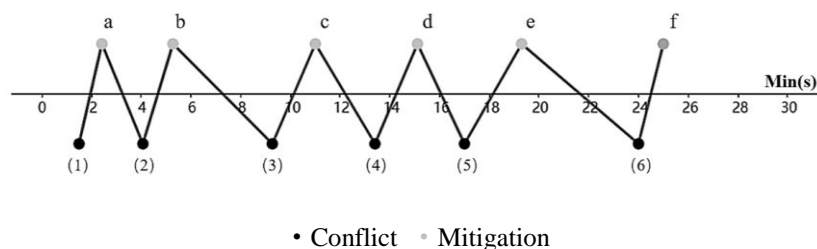


Figure 3. The Arrangement of the Conflict and Mitigation (S1E01)

Figure 3 displays the distribution of conflicts and solutions in S1E01. The horizontal axis represents the duration of the documentary. The black dots below the axis indicate conflict points, while the above denote solutions. The alternating appearance of these points presents a stable, zigzag wave pattern, which illustrates how the 1st season of the documentary employs a narrative structure of “posing a problem—analyzing the problem—solving the problem”, interweaving conflict and resolution to demonstrate how China accomplished its poverty alleviation goals.

Table 1. The Abstracts of the Conflict and Mitigation

Conflict [(x)]	Mitigation [x]
(1) Women lack of opportunities	a. Integration of fashion and ethnic elements
(2) Cheap labor, low income	b. Embroidery cooperated with garment industry
(3) Land desertification for farmers	c. Ant Forest app for tree planting
(4) Poverty due to desertification	d. Ant Forest jobs and reforestation
(5) Low land utilization in Yunnan Province	e. Coffee cultivation based on demand
(6) Unscientific coffee farming practices	f. Starbucks-CFPA coffee support project

The documentary introduces six points of conflict, which are grouped into three pairs, with each pair leading to a corresponding solution. These conflicts and solutions unfold progressively, increasing in complexity. For instance, the sequence “(1) → a → (2) → b” illustrates one such pair, demonstrating how Bouyei women integrated traditional handicrafts with the modern fashion industry to lift themselves out of poverty through entrepreneurship. The other two groups represent marginalized communities: farmers battling desertification and coffee plantation owners lacking farming experience. These perspectives emphasize the “solutions with Chinese characteristic” in the fight against poverty. Rather than merely listing China’s poverty reduction achievements—represented as grey points in the figure—it presents the process of constructing China’s international image through a spiral of problem identification and resolution. This approach enables the audience grasp not only what was achieved but also how and why these successes were realized.

6. Translation and Communication of Constructed National Image

Translation and communication play a pivotal role in the international dissemination of a nation’s image, directly influencing how effectively the pre-constructed image is conveyed abroad. Today, conventional translation practices, with their limited scope, no longer suffice to meet the demands of international exchange. As a form of cross-cultural communication, the dissemination of a national image overseas requires not only employing effective translation strategies but also considering the factors that constrain and shape the translation process.

6.1 The Deconstructionist Strategy in Translation

The strategy of emphasizing marginalization through grand themes conveyed by petty narratives is a hallmark of deconstructionism and is prominently employed in promotional films. This approach aligns the documentary's content more closely with the lives of grassroots individuals, creating a more authentic and relatable style. Characters in these stories often come from diverse ethnic backgrounds, regions, and local cultures. During interviews, the presence of dialects and ellipses in speech challenges translators to move beyond literal translation. Instead, they must apply the deconstructionist principle of "creative rebellion", using their subjective initiative to reveal the underlying meanings of the original content but not just focusing on "loyalty". In doing so, the translator takes on a more active role in shaping the message conveyed to international audiences.

The deconstructionist strategy in translation was inspired by Roland Barthes' 1968 concept of "the death of the author", which challenges the conventional centrality of the author in interpreting a text. Barthes, a key scholar in deconstructionism, proposed that the completion of a work marks the end of the author's dominance, allowing readers—and in the case of cross-cultural communication, translators—to interpret the work independently of the original intent. The "hollow onion" theory by Barthes suggests that texts have multiple layers and dimensions, and it is the role of the reader, or translator, to peel back those layers and construct meaning based on their own perspective. This approach directly challenges the notion of textual centralism and allows for a more flexible, dynamic interpretation of the original work.

With the growth of intercultural communication, translators have emerged as a third entity between the author and reader. Historically, translators acted as "ferryman", striving to remain faithful to the author by translating as accurately as possible. However, the rise of deconstructionism and concepts like "textual indeterminacy" and "creative rebellion" have challenged conventional translation practices. These ideas question the authority of the original work and the feasibility of achieving complete equivalence between source and target languages (Xie Tianzhen, 2002, p. 31). Attempting such equivalence could result in mistranslation, which may hinder the dissemination of a nation's image.

Deconstructionism emphasizes the translator's subjective initiative, allowing for the systematic disruption and reassembly of the original text. This process enables the work to survive and reach new audiences through translation (Huang Zhending, 2005, p. 21). In this context, readers engage more with the translator's reinterpretation than the original author's work. The quality of the translation directly influences the audience's ability to accurately comprehend the documentary's intended message.

For example:

Original text: 我的手，小的时候七岁，跟父母干农活，为了轧糖，轧断了左手。后来就是说我干别的，抬也抬不动，扛也扛不了，自己慢慢想来学刺绣，要有耐心一点（每天）要学6个小时。到今年的话就是40多年了。*(The sentence is selected from an interview in the documentary.)*

Translation: When I was seven years old, I was doing farm work with my parents, my left arm was crushed (by the machine making sugar). (I needed a job to make a living,) but I couldn't lift or carry things, (so) I thought about embroidery. (At first,) I had to be patient and learned (the skill) for six hours (a day). (I've been doing embroidery) for over 40 years. (*The translation has been provided in the interview*)

The characteristic of Chinese having a higher information density than other languages, which means it could convey the same amount of information with fewer characters. This often results in the omission of implied meanings during translation. Deconstructionist translation strategies allow translators to apply their subjective initiative (as shown in the brackets in the translation version) to make the implicit logic in Chinese explicit in English, thereby avoiding potential translation errors. Without destructively reorganizing the original text, it would be challenging for the audience to fully grasp the meaning, potentially leading to serious misunderstandings. For instance, consider the first underlined sentence in the original text: without amplification or logical clarification, it could lead to the following mistranslation:

"My hand, when I was seven years old, doing farm work with parents, in order to make sugar, I broke my left hand."

Therefore, if the translation strictly adhered to equivalence theory, the result might seem formally accurate but would distort the original meaning. By applying deconstructionist translation strategies, the documentary production team made the implicit logic explicit, effectively preventing mistranslations.

6.2 Constructivist Translation Strategy

The constructivist translation approach is informed by the principles of consensus-based truth, relativism, and the role of language as a medium with social functions, which shape both constructivist translation practices and media strategies.

While deconstructionism and constructivism share certain foundational elements, they differ in significant ways. Deconstructionist translation strategies emphasize the creativity and agency of the translator and reader, suggesting that their interpretations of a text may differ from that of the original author. Fundamentally, there is no essential difference between the two approaches. However, deconstructionism highlights individual differences in interpretation without imposing constraints, particularly with respect to the influence of "pre-understanding structures" (or egocentrism bias). This absence of limitations could lead to multiple interpretations, carrying the risk of generating arbitrary meanings (Lü Jun, 2005, p. 37). Constructivism, by contrast, introduces constraint mechanisms within the deconstructionist framework, limiting the arbitrariness of meaning generation and ensuring that the dissemination of the national image remains stable and neutral.

As a paradigm of Sino-foreign co-production, *China on the Move* actively implements the Go Global initiatives in its media strategy, collaborating with new media platforms across multiple countries. The documentary is broadcast in various languages during prime time on major platforms such as Sino Vision, Discovery Exploration, North American new media ODC, BFC in Italy, and ATV SPIRIT in Hungary. The production team carefully considered cultural differences between Chinese and Western films, opting to exclude subtitles for international audiences—a decision often overlooked but one that many overseas viewers appreciate. This nuance, frequently absent in other documentaries like *Every Treasure Tells a Story* and *China in Classics*, reflects the team's sensitivity to audience preferences. Additionally, the team expanded and innovated upon the symbolic representation of China throughout production. They enhanced the visual impact of scene transitions through aesthetic design and AI-assisted techniques, utilizing animation, font changes, and other elements to accentuate deeper meanings.

7. Discussion

As an exemplar of Sino-foreign co-produced documentaries, *China on the Move* leverages deconstructionist strategies, such as decentralization and marginalization, to transcend the constraints of logocentrism in constructing China's national image. Through content selection and narrative techniques, it applies constructivist strategies to reveal the foundational logic underpinning China's continuous development, thereby fostering empathy among its audience. In translation and communication, the strategies of deconstructionist translation highlight the indispensable role of the translator's subjective initiative, whereas the constructivism one introduces necessary constraints on "creative rebellion." Additionally, international communication must account for the cultural norms and ideologies that influence and constrain translation activities. Deconstructionism and constructivism offer novel perspectives and pathways for the construction of national image, fostering curiosity in audiences and encouraging them to critically evaluate different narratives demonstrated by diverse media about China, which would be considered a meaningful step toward fostering greater understanding on national image.

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