

Original Paper

A Study of Translation Strategies for Youth-Oriented Museum Publicity from a Cross-Cultural Perspective: A Case Study of Palace Museum Youth

Jiaqi Shi¹

¹ Shanghai University of International Business and Economics, Shanghai, China

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Abstract

Against the backdrop of China's "Cultural Going Out" strategy, museums have emerged as vital platforms for showcasing Chinese civilization to the world. Young people, as a crucial target audience, present unique cognitive and psychological characteristics that place specific demands on translation. However, current academic research has paid insufficient attention to this demographic segment. This study, grounded in cross-cultural communication theory and an audience-oriented approach to translation, takes the English texts of the Palace Museum's youth-oriented website as its primary research material. By employing a methodology that integrates close textual reading and comparative analysis, and by establishing a functional-dimension classification framework to categorize and analyze translation examples, this research systematically investigates the translation strategies employed. The findings reveal that these texts utilize a three-dimensional strategic framework centered on simplification, interactive engagement, and cultural compensation. These dimensions address the core communicative needs: managing cognitive load, stimulating reading interest, and ensuring cultural comprehension, respectively. The conclusions of this study not only offer a systematic theoretical framework for analyzing youth-oriented museum translation but also provide a practical reference for the translation practice and evaluation of similar cultural publicity texts.

Keywords

Museum Publicity Text Translation, Cross-Cultural Communication, Youth Audience, Translation Strategies

1. Introduction

Within the strategic context of globalization and China's "Cultural Going Out" initiative, museums

have evolved beyond their traditional roles as repositories and exhibition spaces. They now serve as crucial interfaces for constructing national cultural identity and facilitating cross-cultural dialogue. The advancement of digital humanities has further positioned museum websites as primary channels for overseas audiences seeking information about Chinese culture. Among these, the Palace Museum, a paramount symbol and representative of traditional Chinese culture, offers a uniquely valuable case study through its dedicated English-language website for youth audiences (Palace Museum Youth). (Palace, 2025) Distinct from the museum's main website aimed at general adult visitors, this platform integrates educational content, entertainment, and interactivity, undertaking the specific mission of narrating Chinese stories and conveying Eastern aesthetics to young audiences abroad. The publicity texts on this platform are not mere descriptive captions for artifacts. Rather, they represent a form of cross-cultural reproduction tailored to a specific age group. As such, this platform provides an exceptionally valuable exemplar for investigating the interactive dynamics at the intersection of museums, youth audiences, and cross-cultural communication.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Current Research on Museum Publicity Translation

With the deepening of globalization and the advancement of China's "Cultural Going Out" strategy, museum publicity translation has gradually emerged as a significant topic within both translation studies and cross-cultural communication research. Relevant studies have predominantly focused on museum websites, exhibition descriptions, and cultural publicity texts, emphasizing translation strategies, communicative effectiveness, and the construction of cultural imagery. Sun was among the first to analyze the English webpage translation of the Palace Museum from a communication studies perspective, arguing that museum publicity translation must balance information transmission with the construction of cultural identity. (Sun, 2004) Wang and Jiang et al. further systematized the strategic characteristics of tourism and museum website translation from the perspectives of translation communication studies and digital communication. (Jiang, Wang, Deng, & Bao, 2024; Wang, 2014) Overall, existing research has provided relatively mature analytical frameworks for museum publicity translation strategies. However, most studies treat target audiences as a homogeneous overseas readership, paying insufficient attention to intra-audience differentiation, particularly the special demographic of young people.

2.2 Current Research on Audience-Oriented and Youth-Targeted Translation

With the deepening of the so-called "audience turn" in translation studies, scholars have increasingly focused on how translation, as a cross-cultural communicative act, adapts to audience cognition and reception. Chen proposed that museum publicity translation should strengthen audience awareness, emphasizing text readability and acceptability. (Chen, 2012) Bartolini analyzed European university museum websites from an audience-oriented perspective, noting that in digital contexts, translations should be adapted to the cognitive levels of specific audiences. (Bartolini, 2020) More recently, Skyba

et al. combined cognitive load theory to explore the relationship between audience comprehension and information processing in translation and localization. (Skyba, Leshchenko, & Bunechko, 2025) Nevertheless, existing audience-oriented research has largely concentrated on educational texts, commercial communication, or general digital content, rarely integrating youth audience research with the specific context of museum publicity. There remains a lack of systematic analysis of translation adaptation mechanisms in young people's cross-cultural comprehension processes.

2.3 Critical Review and Research Entry Point

In summary, existing research has accumulated substantial findings regarding museum publicity translation strategies on one hand, and has continuously deepened theoretical perspectives in audience orientation and cognitive adaptation on the other. However, a significant research gap persists between these two streams: most studies remain at the level of general audiences, lacking targeted translation strategy research for the specific cognitive demographic of young people. Museum publicity research demonstrates insufficient attention to youth audiences, while youth audience research rarely engages with the authentic practice domain of museum publicity texts.

Accordingly, this study takes the Palace Museum's English-language youth website as its research object. Grounded in cross-cultural communication and audience-oriented translation perspectives, and employing close textual reading and comparative analysis, it systematically investigates how translation strategies respond to the specific needs of young international audiences regarding cognitive load, reading interest, and cultural comprehension. This research aims to enrich scholarly output in the field of youth-oriented museum publicity translation and to provide concrete case references and analytical approaches for related research.

3. Research Design and Methodology

3.1 Corpus Source

The primary corpus for this study consists of cultural introductory texts from the Palace Museum Youth. For the purpose of analysis, texts with clear Chinese-English correspondences were selected. The corpus covers several texts across the categories of artifact descriptions, historical narratives, and cultural activity introductions. All selected materials are oriented toward young readers and possess stable audience positioning and communicative objectives.

3.2 Research Method

This study employs a combined methodology of close reading and comparative analysis. This involves a systematic comparison of source texts and their translations across three key dimensions: information structure, narrative mode, and cultural presentation. Building on this comparative foundation and guided by an audience-oriented perspective, the study proceeds to categorize the identified translation examples by strategy type. These strategies are then analyzed and organized according to their primary communicative function, with the aim of constructing a functional translation strategy model specifically tailored to youth audiences.

4. An Audience-Oriented Strategic Framework for Youth Publicity Translation

4.1 Readability: Simplification Strategies to Reduce Cognitive Load

4.1.1 Youth Audience Characteristics from a Cognitive Load Perspective

From the perspective of Cognitive Load Theory, youth audiences show stage-specific limitations in their information processing capacity, background knowledge reserves, and comprehension of abstract concepts. Therefore, when encountering content with unfamiliar historical and cultural contexts, the primary question that museum publicity translation for this group must address is “Is it understandable?”—that is, to reduce the information processing burden while preserving core meaning.

4.1.2 Types and Implementation Paths of Simplification Strategies

Corpus analysis reveals that translators primarily achieve text simplification through three strategies: Generalization, Analogy, and Omission, aiming to reduce information density and establish cognitive reference frames.

ST1: 乾隆皇帝平定准噶尔、回部、大小金川等，自诩“十全武功”，晚年自号“十全老人”。

TT1: Emperor Qianlong [...] conducted ten major military campaigns, all successful. He called these accomplishments his “Ten Great Campaigns” [...] The phrase represented a life of flawless perfection (Palace Museum Youth 2025, ‘An Extensive Search for Auspicious Motifs’).

In this example, the source text contains specific historical proper nouns like “Zhungar (准噶尔)” and “Daxiaojinchuan (大小金川)”, resulting in extremely high information density. For overseas youth lacking a background in Chinese history, directly translating these unfamiliar battle names would create significant reading obstacles and increase cognitive load. The translator employs a generalization strategy. Instead of listing each specific military campaign, the translation consolidates them into “ten major military campaigns”. This approach moves beyond intricate historical details. It directly extracts the core messages of “numerous” and “successful”. As a result, the comprehension threshold is lowered. Furthermore, for the obscure political title “Shiquan Laoren (十全老人, meaning ‘Ten-Perfect Old Man’), the translation transforms its connotation into “a life of flawless perfection”, converting complex imperial political rhetoric into a universal value easily understood by youth. Through this generalized restructuring, the translation effectively compresses the highly concentrated historical information density of the source text, maintaining core meaning while aligning better with young readers’ cognitive preference for linear reading and quick comprehension. This example can thus be categorized as a typical application of the “generalization” simplification strategy.

ST2: 明宣宗行乐图表现了皇帝进行捶丸游戏的场景。

TT2: Known for its formalities, golf is often referred to as a gentleman’s sport. But did you know that centuries ago, a similar game involving striking balls into holes was popular in the Forbidden City? Emperor Xuande (r. 1425-1435) of the Ming dynasty was an enthusiast of this game, called chuiwan (ball-hitting), which was particularly loved by the nobility and bore striking similarities to golf (Palace Museum Youth 2025, ‘The Olympics of the Forbidden City’).

The source text, “The painting portraying Emperor Xuande of the Ming dynasty depicts him playing chuiwan,” is a statement heavily dependent on Chinese historical and cultural context. “Chuiwan (捶丸, literally ‘ball-hitting’)”, as a traditional court sport, offers overseas youth neither practical experience nor a clear cognitive reference. A literal translation would require readers to simultaneously understand the painting’s context, historical figures, and an unfamiliar sport, likely causing comprehension breakdown. The translation does not present “chuiwan” as an isolated cultural symbol. Instead, it employs an analogy strategy, introducing “golf”—a modern sport familiar to youth—as a cognitive anchor, placing the unfamiliar concept within an existing experiential framework. This analogy is not a simple equation; by emphasizing features like “gentleman’s sport” and “particularly loved by the nobility”, it enables youth, without knowledge of ancient Chinese sports history, to quickly grasp the social function and cultural significance of “chuiwan”. Through analogy, the abstract and unfamiliar historical activity is transformed into a perceivable, imaginable life experience, reducing comprehension difficulty for young international audiences. Therefore, this example demonstrates the audience-oriented characteristic of the “analogy” construction strategy.

ST3: 这些如意多由地方官员进贡或清宫内务府造办处制作。

TT3: The Palace Museum alone houses over 2,000 ruyi pieces, [...] crafted by artisans of the Imperial Workshop (Palace Museum Youth 2025, ‘Ruyi—As I wish, Always as I wish’).

The source text’s “Qing Gong Neiwufu Zaobanchu (清宫内务府造办处)” is the full name of a specific Qing Dynasty imperial institution, containing multiple layers of information: dynasty, departmental attributes, and specific functions. For youth audiences focused on appreciating the artifact, memorizing this complex bureaucratic name is both difficult and unnecessary. Here, an omission strategy is applied, filtering out cumbersome administrative hierarchy details like “Neiwufu (Imperial Household Department) and retaining only the most substantive elements: “Imperial” and “Workshop”. This strategy maximizes textual conciseness while ensuring informational accuracy (i.e., crafted by imperial artisans), allowing the audience to focus their limited cognitive resources on the aesthetic appreciation and understanding of the artifact itself. This approach belongs to the “omission” simplification strategy.

4.2 Approachability: Interactive Strategies to Enhance Reader Engagement

4.2.1 Characteristics of Youth Digital Reading Behavior

Within the digital communication landscape, youth audiences demonstrate a marked preference for participatory and interactive modes of information reception. Their reading behavior is characterized by fragmentation, context-dependency, and emotional drive. Compared to traditional, linearly-structured, monologic expository texts, narrative modes imbued with a sense of dialogue and interactivity are more effective in capturing attention and sustaining reading interest. From the perspectives of cross-cultural communication and audience-oriented translation, youth-focused museum publicity translation must therefore address a further communicative challenge: “Is it engaging enough to continue reading?”

4.2.2 Interactive Modes of Dialogic Narrative Strategy

Guided by this imperative, the translations on the Palace Museum Youth website transcend the function of mere information conveyance. By employing a dialogic narration strategy, they transform originally unidirectional, declarative statements into textual forms with a distinct sense of exchange. The core of this approach lies in simulating a “conversational” scenario, thereby reducing the psychological distance between the text and the reader, and enhancing the appeal and participatory quality of the publicity material.

ST4: 如意，又称“爪杖”或“搔杖”，其雏形源于古代用以搔背止痒的生活工具。

TT4: Here’s a question: What can you do when your back itches, but your arms are not that long? Please join me in welcoming the backscratcher (Palace Museum Youth 2025, ‘Ruyi—As I wish, Always as I wish’)!

The source text introduces the “ruyi (如意)” through an objective, declarative mode centered on defining the artifact and stating its function, emphasizing its etymological origin and practical use in a linear narrative. A translation adhering to this structure, while preserving informational completeness, would likely fail to immediately capture the attention of a youth audience. Instead of replicating this expository discourse, the translator restructures the informational sequence using a hook strategy. By repositioning the functional aspect (back-scratching) from the latter part of the sentence to the very beginning and recasting it as an opening question, the translation actively engages the reader. The introductory phrase “Here’s a question:” and the use of the highly relatable, cross-culturally accessible scenario of “an itchy back one cannot reach” instantly activate the reader’s experiential memory and foster situational immersion. This approach deliberately withholds the cultural artifact (“ruyi”) itself, first creating cognitive suspense and drawing the reader into the text through problem-solving impetus. The subsequent invitation, “Please join me in welcoming the backscratcher,” then naturally introduces the artifact, enabling a smooth transition from shared life experience to specific cultural object. This structural adaptation, informed by youth reading psychology, effectively heightens the text’s appeal and accessibility, creating favorable conditions for the subsequent comprehension and reception of cultural information. It exemplifies the “hook” interactive mode within the dialogic narrative strategy.

ST5: 紫禁城的建筑装饰中蕴含着大量以吉祥寓意为主题的图案。

TT5: The Forbidden City is filled with numerous auspicious motifs—let’s go on a hunt for them (Palace Museum Youth 2025, ‘An Extensive Search for Auspicious Motifs’)!

In this instance, the source text, “The architectural decorations of the Forbidden City incorporate numerous motifs conveying auspicious symbolism,” is a typical summarizing statement. Its tone is objective and neutral, its information directive clear, yet it positions the reader purely as a passive receiver. For youth audiences with limited attention spans and whose reading motivation is heavily reliant on interest, such monologic assertion, while informative, is unlikely to spark further exploratory desire. A direct translation might result in a text that merely conveys the fact of numerous motifs, lacking the impetus to read on. The translation counters this by adopting a gamified dialogic narrative

strategy, converting the declarative sentence into an expression with a call-to-action quality. The phrase “let’s go on a hunt for them!” explicitly introduces an interactive context, transforming the reader from an information recipient into an active participant. The word “hunt”, borrowed from gaming and adventure contexts, implies a process of searching and discovery. In doing so, it reframes the abstract concept of “auspicious motifs (吉祥如意)” into a tangible object of exploration. This treatment not only lowers the psychological barrier to cultural understanding but also, by fostering a sense of “joint participation”, effectively aligns with young readers’ preference for interactive and exploratory reading. It simultaneously enhances the text’s appeal and strengthens the memorability and attractiveness of the publicity message. This translation therefore embodies the “gamified invitation” interactive characteristic of the dialogic narrative strategy.

ST6: 王羲之的书法艺术深受历代帝王推崇。

TT6: Did you think only Emperor Taizong admired Wang Xizhi? Certainly not. Throughout history, many emperors cherished Wang’s calligraphy (Palace Museum Youth 2025, ‘No. 1 Running Script Handwriting in the World’).

The source text “Wang Xizhi’s calligraphy enjoyed high esteem among successive emperors,” constitutes a highly condensed evaluative statement with concentrated information density, yet its narrative mode favors conclusion-first presentation, lacking narrative tension for youth readers. The translation employs interrogation to restructure the original judgmental statement into dialogic development. The translation first introduces “Did you think only Emperor Taizong admired Wang Xizhi?” proactively presupposing potential cognitive limitations of readers and creating cognitive dissonance through questioning; immediately following with “Certainly not” as negative response, forming immediate feedback within simulated dialogue; then supplementing “Throughout history, many emperors cherished Wang’s calligraphy” to complete informational expansion. This layered progressive structure unfolds cultural information through a “question-answer-elaboration” process. Compared to directly stating conclusions, this dialogic narration better aligns with youth question-driven comprehension habits, not only enhancing textual appeal but also conforming to youth preferences in digital media environments for participation, feedback, and immediate responsiveness in reading experiences. This example accordingly represents a typical application of “interrogative interaction” within dialogic narrative strategy.

4.3 Comprehensibility: Compensatory Strategies to Bridge Cultural Gaps

4.3.1 The Problem of Cultural Gaps in Cross-Cultural Understanding

Cultural gap refers to the situation where target language audiences lack the background and cognitive foundation of the source culture, resulting in an inability to fully comprehend the implicit cultural information embedded in source texts. In cross-cultural communication, the critical question that must be addressed is “Will there be misunderstanding?” Cultural knowledge, historical background, symbolic meanings, and other elements in source texts are often presupposed, yet target audiences do not possess this background knowledge. Particularly for overseas youth, their understanding of

traditional Chinese culture tends to be fragmented or piecemeal. Direct reliance on source cultural background may lead to information misinterpretation or cultural disconnection. Therefore, museum publicity translation for youth audiences must not only achieve transformation at the linguistic level but also implement compensation at the cultural level, ensuring that cultural information can be effectively understood and received.

4.3.2 Implementation Approaches of Compensatory Translation Strategies

In the Palace Museum Youth English website, translators primarily employ compensatory translation strategies such as semantic explicitation and explanatory elaboration to appropriately expand upon content with high cultural loading, thereby enhancing the comprehensibility of translations in cross-cultural contexts and ensuring that cultural information can be accurately understood and effectively received.

ST7: 荷花与燕子组成的图案，取“荷”与“河”、“燕”与“晏”之谐音，寓意“河清海晏”，象征天下太平。

TT7: [...] lotus flowers paired with swallows represent that peace reigns under heaven (In Chinese, lotus “荷” and river “河” are homophones, as are swallow “燕” and peaceful “晏”). (Palace Museum Youth 2025, ‘Ruyi—As I wish, Always as I wish’)

The symbolic meaning of “heqing haiyan (河清海晏, meaning ‘rivers clear, seas calm’)” is rooted in Chinese homophonic wordplay and traditional political symbolism. A simple literal translation into the abstract term “peace” would fail to convey the inherent logic between the motif’s composition and its symbolic meaning. Rather than stopping at a result-oriented explanation, the translation employs semantic explicitation through parenthetical clarification, explicitly explaining the homophonic relationships and converting the implicit cultural mechanism—which is highly dependent on the Chinese phonetic system—into explicit knowledge. This treatment preserves the cultural characteristic of traditional Chinese motifs wherein “form conveys meaning and sound generates significance”, while simultaneously preventing comprehension barriers that target audiences might encounter due to lack of linguistic background. Through semantic explicitation, the translation transforms symbolism dependent on the Chinese language system into interpretable and comprehensible cultural information, effectively bridging the cognitive gap between cross-linguistic and cross-cultural understanding. This example thus represents a typical application of the “semantic explicitation compensation strategy”.

ST8: 魏晋时代.....派生出一项重要游戏——曲水流觞。

TT8: During the Wei and Jin dynasties, people invented a popular game known as ‘floating wine cups on a winding stream’ (Qushui liushang). Qushui refers to a winding stream, and shang meant a wine cup [...] How was the game played? A wine cup [...] (Palace Museum Youth 2025, ‘No. 1 Running Script Handwriting in the World’)

“Qushui liushang (曲水流觞, meaning ‘floating wine cups on winding streams’)”, as a highly condensed cultural term, encapsulates a specific historical context, literati gathering traditions, and ritual cultural connotations, for which overseas youth possess virtually no direct corresponding

cognitive experience. Rather than merely providing pinyin or a brief definition, the translation employs explanatory elaboration, explaining step-by-step the term's composition, literal meaning, and specific gameplay, with "How was the game played?" guiding readers into the explanatory segment. This progression from concept to process transforms an abstract cultural activity into a visualizable and imaginable behavioral scenario, helping readers establish a complete cognitive schema at the comprehension level. Through explanatory elaboration, the translation decomposes an originally highly condensed cultural concept into coherent information units. Consequently, it lowers the cognitive threshold for youth in cross-cultural understanding. Therefore, this translation example can be classified as a typical application of the "explanatory elaboration strategy".

5. Conclusion

This study takes the Palace Museum Youth English website as its research object and analyzes the translation adaptation issues involved in cultural communication targeting overseas youth audiences. The findings reveal that translation of such texts does not rely on a single technique but rather employs a multi-dimensional strategic framework centered on "Readability-Approachability-Comprehensibility", corresponding respectively to audience needs at three levels: information comprehension, reading engagement, and cultural interpretation.

The significance of this research lies in integrating concepts related to cognitive load, reading participation, and cultural compensation into a strategic analytical framework for youth-oriented publicity texts from an audience-oriented perspective, demonstrating through concrete corpus analysis the functional division and synergistic mechanisms of different strategy types. At the case level, this study systematically summarizes the operational mechanisms of strategies such as generalization, analogy, dialogic narration, and semantic explicitation, thereby offering reference approaches for museum and related cultural institutions' translation practice in youth-oriented publicity. Admittedly, this research is primarily based on the Palace Museum as a representative case and has certain limitations in corpus breadth. Future research may expand to comparative verification across other museums' youth-oriented publicity platforms and incorporate empirical methods such as reader surveys to advance deeper development in this field.

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