

## *Original Paper*

# Cultural Default in China's Foreign external Publicity Texts and Its Translation Strategies

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### ***Abstract***

*This paper discusses cultural default in external publicity translation and its translation strategies. External publicity, as a cross-cultural communication activity, aims to convey China's political ideas, cultural traditions and development achievements to the international community. However, the cognitive differences between China and the West in ecological, material, social, religious and linguistic and cultural aspects have led to a meaning vacuum of source language cultural information in the target language context, resulting in cultural default. In order to compensate for the impact of cultural default on Sino-foreign communication, translators usually adopt explicit and implicit compensation translation strategies: the former uses literal translation and annotations to make the cultural background explicit; the latter uses free translation, naturalization and other means to achieve semantic reconstruction and cultural adaptation. Research shows that the reasonable use of compensation strategies can strike a balance between preserving cultural authenticity and improving communication effectiveness, avoiding both the understanding barriers caused by excessive alienation and the cultural dilution caused by naturalization, thereby optimizing the cross-cultural communication effect of external publicity texts.*

### ***Keywords***

*cultural default, external publicity, explicit compensation, implicit compensation, translation strategy*

External publicity is a form of publicity targeting the international community, aimed primarily at overseas audiences whose ideologies and value systems significantly differ from those domestically (Zhang, 2013). Effective external publicity activities can help a country shape a positive international public opinion, enhance its influence in international affairs, and promote friendly cooperation with other nations.

## 1. The Influence of Cultural Factors on External Publicity Translation

Due to the diverse cultural backgrounds, people have many differences in cognitive structure, thinking mode, values, customs and habits. Therefore, in the process of translating external publicity texts, it is necessary to make adaptive adjustments to the information of the original text, otherwise the translation may appear obscure and difficult to understand, and may also conflict with the cultural expectations of the target audience. Secondly, cultural differences will also affect the content selection and key transmission of external publicity texts. Symbols, allusions or values in a specific cultural background may exceed the cultural background of the target audience. In 1954, American linguist Charles F. Hockett first proposed the concept of "cultural default" and named it "arbitrary loopholes in form" (Gao, 2010).

Cultural default is a phenomenon of cognitive framework dislocation caused by structural differences in heterogeneous cultural systems in cross-cultural communication. Its core originates from the unique cognitive paradigms and social practices formed by different ethnic groups in historical evolution. When a certain cultural phenomenon or expression lacks corresponding concepts or language structures in the target culture, the problem of "cultural default" will arise, which will lead to the inability to effectively transmit cultural information and even cause misunderstandings and misinterpretations. When the two parties in communication cannot activate equivalent cognitive schemas in contextual association, the "self-evident" information in the source language culture becomes a semantic vacuum in the target language culture, resulting in a break in the communication chain. This phenomenon is essentially a manifestation of the incommensurability of heterogeneous cultures at the level of ideology and symbolic representation. It not only reflects the objective existence of cultural diversity, but also highlights the necessity and complexity of cross-cultural adaptation. Wang pointed out that cultural default is nothing more than the omission of cultural background knowledge in the communication process. Its essence is the cognitive gap caused by cultural specificity (Wang, 1997).

## 2. The Formation of Cultural Default

Language and culture are interdependent. When language acts on culture, it is the carrier and container of cultural information. The Chinese and English people grew up in their respective cultural backgrounds. In the long-term development process, they formed different national psychology, thinking methods and cognitive patterns, and formed their own unique national customs, religious beliefs and cultural traditions, which will naturally be reflected in the language. This national and regional characteristics of culture make the cultural information that is self-evident in one culture become a meaning vacuum for readers of different cultures, because the relevant cultural schemas in the original author's memory do not exist or are incomplete in their minds, so they cannot activate the relevant schemas according to the content of the text, leading to communication failure or incomplete understanding. Cultural default can be classified into five categories: ecological cultural default, material cultural default, social cultural default, religious cultural default, and linguistic cultural default

### 3. Translation Strategies

Translation is often about dealing with cultural conflicts. Culturally specific words and images are usually distinctive in themselves and rely on a specific social and cultural background. However, it is not easy to find appropriate equivalent expressions in the target language, because in many cases, the target language readers may know very little or even nothing about things that are familiar to the original language readers.

Translators are required to make necessary compensation in the translation process to avoid or reduce the loss of meaning. Harvey defines translation compensation as follows: compensation is a technique of recreating a similar effect in the target language text by using means unique to the target language and its text, so as to compensate for the loss of the source language text effect (Harvey, 1998). In the specific translation process, due to the many differences between the source language and the target language as well as factors such as the translator's quality, some of the original work's content, phonetic effects, rhetorical techniques and expressiveness are inevitably difficult to express and lost. Some of the losses that the translator is aware of can be compensated by using certain means to minimize the losses. When encountering cultural defaults in external publicity materials, translators usually adopt translation strategies of explicit compensation and implicit compensation (Ma, 2003).

#### 3.1 Explicit Compensation

Explicit compensation refers to the translation strategy which is able to actively bridge the cultural differences between Chinese and English by making the language form explicit or supplementing cultural information. It usually reflects the translator's tendency to translate in an alienated way in the form of explicit annotations (including footnotes, endnotes, transposition notes, in-text notes, and prefaces and appendices of the translated version). Idioms and allusions, which are culturally distinctive words of a language, contain distinct cultural connotations and can inspire unique emotions in the original readers. When translating such words, translators should give priority to the method of literal translation and annotation. By providing annotations, translators can further explain the Chinese cultural background contained in the source text to the target language readers to make up for the cultural defaults that the target language readers may have and minimize the loss of cultural information. At the same time, they also introduce the cultural knowledge carried by the original text and can convey the cultural value of the source text in a comprehensive way

Example1:

ST: 要坚持实行“米袋子”省长负责制和“菜篮子”市长负责制。

TT: We will continue to implement the system of provincial governors assuming responsibility for the “rice bag” (grain supply) program and city mayors for the “vegetable basket” (non-stable food supply) program.

If we simply translate “米袋子” into “rice bag” and “菜篮子” into “vegetable basket”, foreign readers may only understand the literal meaning, one being a bag for rice and the other a basket for vegetables, and ignore the rhetorical method of “metonymy” used here. Consequently, they fail to realize the

importance of these two in Chinese people's livelihood. Thus, the translator employs the method of "in-text annotation" and added (grain supply) after "rice bag" and (non-stable food supply) after "vegetable basket".

Example 2:

ST: 为进一步发展外向型经济, 上海最近将出台一系列优惠政策, 以鼓励国内外经营创建更多的 三资企业。

TT: To further develop the export-oriented economy, Shanghai is to make a number of preferential policies soon to encourage business people both at home and abroad to set up more enterprises in the three forms of ventures, that is, enterprises for Sino-foreign joint venture, for Sino-foreign co-production and enterprise with sole foreign capital.

“三资企业”(three forms of ventures) is a special term of China's national conditions and is very familiar to Chinese people. However, ordinary foreign readers do not understand the content of it. Therefore, it is necessary to further explain it in the translation so that its meaning can be clearly stated.

Example 3:

ST: 三伏天里, 交警还在马路上挥汗如雨得指挥交通。

TT: During "san-fu" days, the traffic police is coordinating the traffic strenuously.

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*"san-fu" is a period of the lunar calendar, the hottest days of the year .*

In this example, “三伏天” is a term with cultural element. Ancient Chinese people used lunar calendar to determine the weather and conduct agricultural production. "Sanfu days" is the hottest time of the year in China, but foreign readers lack the concept of the lunar calendar and therefore do not know much about it. In its English translation, when “三伏天” is just converted to "san-fu", due to cultural differences, information may be lost. Therefore, a note should be added, "*san-fu*", that is "*a period of the lunar calendar, the hottest days of the year*".

In the translation of the above three examples, the original content is presented in the form of literal translation, and annotations are inserted in the text to explain specific vocabulary, idioms or cultural background. This translation strategy can better preserve the original flavor of the source language culture, convey the true state of culture, help the target language readers to understand the connotation of the source language culture more deeply and comprehensively. Thus, the unique charm of the source language culture can be truly appreciated, and the effect of cross-cultural communication can be improved.

The annotation method is often used in external publicity translation practice. Some concise expressions are used in Chinese publicity materials, mainly to make the information clearer and more effective, easy to read, and leave a deep impression on readers, such as "五讲四美" (five merits to advocate--civilized behavior, common courtesy, hygienic conditions, proper discipline and public morality; and four virtues to promote--lofty sentiments, refined language, good manners and environmental awareness), "三讲教育" (three emphases education, i.e., to stress theoretical study,

political awareness and good conduct), “五位一体” (“Five-in-One new pattern(all-round economic, political, cultural, social, and ecological progress)”). In translating these terms, literal translation method is used to restore the concise structural form of the terms, and then the connotation of the terms is explained by adding annotations, which ensures the readability of the translation and enhance its acceptance.

In addition to the above-mentioned in-text annotations, the explicit compensation strategy of external publicity translation also uses extra-text annotations. In other words, in the translation process, the original text is presented in a literal translation manner, and annotations are added outside the text to explain the content in the original text that is difficult to understand due to cultural defaults. This method can better present the original author's artistic motivation and the aesthetic value of the text, and can help readers understand the deep meaning and context contained in the source text, thereby compensating for the cognitive barriers caused by cultural differences. In addition, extra-text annotations can take advantage of the fact that annotations are relatively free from space restrictions to introduce relevant original cultural knowledge in more detail, thus ensuring the coherence of the text.

There are significant differences in the use of in-text and external annotations in literal translation. In-text annotations are usually used for phrases or cultural elements that require immediate interpretation. In contrast, external annotations are independent of the main text and are suitable for detailed explanations of more complex cultural backgrounds or long messages. These two methods have different focuses and promote readers' understanding and absorption of the cultural connotations of the original text in different ways, thereby improving the effectiveness of cross-cultural communication.

### 3.2 *Implicit Compensation*

Implicit compensation refers to the translation practice when the translator makes full use of various means of the target language, adjusting the original text through non-equivalent conversion means, and reconstructing the source language cultural information in the target text in order to achieve reader response equivalence. Compared with the direct interpretation or annotation of explicit compensation, implicit compensation often uses translation methods such as paraphrase, syntactic reorganization, and naturalization to achieve cultural adaptation while retaining the functional equivalence of the original text. For example, Chinese allusions can be replaced by English idioms, and classical poetry images can be transformed into metaphorical expressions, so as to bridge the cultural cognitive gap and ensure the readability and acceptability of the translation. This strategy emphasizes the cognitive framework of the target language readers and seeks a dynamic balance between loss compensation and meaning reconstruction.

#### Example 4:

ST: 以咬定青山不放松的执着奋力实现既定目标, 以行百里者半九十的清醒不懈推进中华民族伟大复兴。

TT: With the determination to never let up until we reach our goals and the attitude that the last leg of

the journey marks the halfway point only, we must make unremitting efforts to advance the rejuvenation of the Chinese nation.

In this example, the translator effectively achieves cross-cultural functional equivalence through the strategy of paraphrase. First, the original text "咬定青山不放松" uses the image of ancient poetry. The translator abandons the natural metaphor of "青山" and refined its "perseverance" content, translating it into "determination to never let up", conveying firmness with English idioms; and the allusion of "行百里者半九十" is translated into "the last leg marks the halfway point", borrowing the Western travel idiom "last leg" to reconstruct the metaphor, which not only retains the warning semantics of unfinished mission but also avoids cultural barriers. Secondly, at the political semantic level, the translation of "伟大复兴" employs the internationally used "rejuvenation" instead of a literal translation, weakening the nationalist color and conforming to the norms of external publicity discourse; "不懈推进" is translated as "make unremitting efforts to advance", strengthening the continuity and legitimacy of the action through Latin etymological words. This translation achieves the "emotional resonance" and "value docking" of political rhetoric in cross-context through core semantic extraction, cultural image replacement and ideological adaptation, avoiding the understanding barriers caused by culturally specific items, and faithfully conveying the central concept of "continuous struggle" in deep logic through semantic reconstruction and rhetorical adaptation.

Example 5:

ST: 保护生态环境, 不能头痛医头, 脚痛医脚。

TT: Protecting the ecosystem requires more than a simplistic, palliative approach.

Example 6:

ST: 以“一老一小”为重点完善人口服务体系。

TT: Improve the population service system with a focus on elderly care and child care.

In the translation of example 5 and 6, the free translation strategy achieves cross-cultural adaptation through cultural image conversion. Example 5 “头痛医头, 脚痛医脚” is a metaphor unique to Chinese medicine culture, and literal translation can easily cause comprehension difficulties. The translator transforms it into "simplistic, palliative approach", using "palliative" to correspond to the deep semantics of “治标不治本”, and reconstructed the metaphor with Western medical concepts, which not only retains the criticism of "short-sighted governance" but also conforms to English cognitive logic. In Example 6, “一老一小” is a policy abbreviation, and literal translation is difficult to convey the focus of key groups. The translator breaks it down into "elderly care and child care", clarifies the service objects through semantic expansion, and eliminates ambiguity in the Chinese context. Both examples abandon the literal form of the original text, but focus on conceptual equivalence.

### 3.3 Domestication

Another cross-cultural conversion strategy used in implicit compensation is domestication, which is a translation strategy oriented towards the target language culture. Its core goal is to eliminate the heterogeneous cultural characteristics of the source text by reconstructing the language form and

cultural imagery, thereby improving the acceptability and communication effectiveness of the translation. The theoretical basis of this strategy is derived from the concept of "cultural adaptation", which emphasizes that the translator needs to actively intervene in the text and transform the culturally specific symbol system in the source language into an expression mode that conforms to the cognitive framework of the target language readers. Domestication reduces cultural friction and can significantly improve the efficiency of cross-cultural communication in external publicity texts (such as political documents, travel guides, etc.), ensuring the accuracy and immediacy of information transmission. However, excessive naturalization may dilute the symbolic meaning of the source language culture and even trigger a homogenization crisis of cultural identity. Therefore, naturalization practice needs to follow dual principles: it must meet the acceptance expectations of the target language audience and maintain the core characteristics of the source language culture.

The choice of naturalization in external publicity translation essentially reflects the audience-oriented principle, requiring translators to build the optimal solution between cultural facsimile and communicative function. Its methodological value lies in providing an operational adaptation path for cross-cultural communication. For example, if “以外贸企业为龙头” is translated into "with foreign trade enterprises as the dragon head", it will cause misunderstanding among Western readers, because in the minds of Westerners, dragon is a terrifying monster and a ferocious image. Therefore, translating “龙头” into “dragon head” will certainly not express the true meaning. If it is translated into "with foreign trade firms as the locomotive/flagship", using the well-known locomotive or flagship as a metaphor, the problem will be solved.

Similarly, if "中国改革进到深水区" is translated into "China's reform has entered the deep water zone.", foreign readers will think that this implies that “the reform failed”. This is because "If somebody's in deep water, he's pretty much finished." In fact, “进入深水区” (“entering the deep water zone”) in Chinese means that the reform has entered a more complicated stage from the initial "crossing the river by feeling the stones", which actually means that the difficulty of reform has increased. Therefore, a more reasonable translation for "中国改革进到深水区" should be "entering the most difficult stage."

## Conclusion

One principle of cultural default compensation is to enable the target text readers to enjoy cultural exploration. The cultural function of translation determines that translation plays an important role in constructing foreign culture and has a profound impact on the target culture. From the perspective of cultural exchange and the expectations of the target text readers, the translator should try his best to enable the target text readers to appreciate the unique exoticism and cultural information contained in the original text in the process of cultural default compensation, and should not make the target text readers lose the opportunity to enjoy cultural exploration due to excessive compensation. Therefore, in translation practice, the translator should carefully examine the cultural factors in the original text, and

flexibly make the correct compensation strategy according to the specific situation of the original text and the requirements of the principle of cultural compensation.

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