

A Study on the Translation and Dissemination of Yellow River Culture from the Perspective of Translational Communication Studies

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Abstract

The Yellow River culture, as an integral component of traditional Chinese culture, significantly enhances China's cultural soft power. Effectively narrating the stories of the Yellow River is essential for promoting Chinese culture on a global scale. This paper examines translation and dissemination strategies of Yellow River culture through the lens of Translational Communication Studies, focusing on media, audience reception, and communication effects. It explores translation and communication strategies at the levels of vocabulary, syntax, and rhetoric.

Keywords

Yellow River Culture, Translational Communication Studies, Translation and Dissemination

1. Introduction

In today's era, translation transcends mere linguistic conversion; it serves as a vital means to introduce China to the world, expand China's discourse power, facilitate its "going global" strategy, and participate in global governance (Huang, 2022). As a treasure of Chinese culture, the Yellow River culture embodies the historical memory and spiritual aspirations of the Chinese nation. Its translation and dissemination abroad are invaluable for enhancing the international influence and competitiveness of Chinese culture.

Translational Communication Studies, an emerging interdisciplinary field, integrates theoretical achievements from translation studies, communication studies, and cultural studies. It aims to explore how humans use language and symbols to communicate information, ideas, and emotions across different cultures and

establish certain social relationships (Wu & Lin, 2023). This paper seeks to investigate the translation and dissemination strategies of Yellow River culture from the perspective of Translational Communication Studies, offering insights for the international promotion of Chinese culture.

2. An Overview of Translational Communication Studies

The traditional translation analysis method takes “linguistic equivalence” as its core evaluation criterion, focusing on the degree of matching between the source language and the target language at the lexical, grammatical, and semantic levels—such as word-for-word correspondence and syntactic structure restoration. However, it neglects the “communicative attribute” and “audience feedback” of translation activities. Yet Translational Communication Studies draws on theoretical progress from translation studies and communication studies alike to form its core framework. Unlike traditional single-discipline research, it centers on investigating how language and culture are disseminated across cultural boundaries—specifically delving into the procedural dynamics, strategic design and actual outcomes of such dissemination. Moreover, it goes beyond textual analysis to explore how these dissemination processes interact with and are shaped by broader societal contexts, including political systems, economic structures, and cultural traditions. For translation studies, this field introduces an innovative pathway to break through existing theoretical limitations and expand disciplinary horizons: by adopting the analytical lens of communication studies, it enables a shift from inward-looking textual scrutiny to an outward, comprehensive view of translation phenomena, considering not just linguistic conversion but the full spectrum of factors influencing cross-cultural information transfer.

In China, over the past three decades, scholars have concentrated on developing the theoretical foundations of Translational Communication Studies and integrating it with the translation of Chinese culture and literary works for in-depth exploration. The inherent nature of translation suggests its classification as a branch of communication studies (Lv, 1997). Tan Zaixi (2023) noted that researchers can gain valuable insights by analyzing specific translation examples within relevant communication events from linguistic, cultural, and political perspectives. Ren Wen and Zhao Tianyuan (2023) emphasized the importance of translation output in national translation capability. By integrating theories from translation and communication studies, they introduced the concept of “national translation and communication capability.” Translation activities inherently possess communicative attributes and are considered a “special form of interlinguistic information exchange involving linguistic behavior and language choice” (Wilss, 2001: p. 14).

Translational Communication Studies represents a novel research paradigm that examines the dissemination processes, strategies, and effects of language and culture in cross-cultural communication, along with their relationships with various aspects such as society, politics, economy, and culture. It signifies a new attempt in the theoretical construction and expansion of the disciplinary space of

translation studies. Over the past three decades, domestic scholars in China have focused on constructing the theoretical framework of Translational Communication Studies and integrating it with the translation of Chinese culture and literary translation for in-depth exploration and research.

The integration of communication studies with the external promotion of Chinese culture holds significant importance. This paper focuses on three core elements in Translational Communication Studies—medium, receptor, and effect. It provides an in-depth analysis of English translation practices in documentaries about Yellow River culture, aiming to develop effective translation strategies to enhance its global influence and communication effect, thereby fully highlighting the charm of Yellow River culture to a worldwide audience.

3. Strategies for Foreign Translation and Dissemination of Yellow River Culture

In recent years, China has utilized various channels to promote the international dissemination of Yellow River culture, including tourist materials, foreign publicity materials, conferences, forums, and media promotion. Among these approaches, media promotion plays a particularly crucial role. With the transformation of media, translation activities are evolving from “professional practice” to a broader “social communication practice” (Wolf, 2011: p. 3). This paper primarily analyzes promotional videos such as *CGTN Nature and China’s Yellow River* as research texts to study the translation strategies employed in these videos.

3.1. Lexical Level

Translation is far more than a simple correspondence of words; it is a complex art that encompasses language, culture, context, and the conveyance of emotions. If translation focuses solely on finding direct lexical equivalents, the resulting text is likely to fail in accurately conveying the deeper meaning and cultural nuances of the original. This can lead to the target audience’s inability to fully grasp its true intention and value. Significant differences exist in how audiences understand the cultural connotations of words across different linguistic habits and environments (Li, 2018). Therefore, effective translation requires a deep understanding of the original text’s meaning while also considering the cultural characteristics of the target language and the audience’s capacity for reception, ensuring accurate communication and effective transmission of information.

Example 1

SL: 河道被收窄成壶口的形状，形成了规模壮观的壶口瀑布。

TL: The dramatic funnel-shaped channel creates the spectacular Hukou Waterfall.

Appreciation: This translation excels in vocabulary choice by effectively conveying both the visual and dynamic aspects of the original Chinese description. The adjective “dramatic” captures the awe-inspiring nature of the waterfall, while

“funnel-shaped” precisely renders the “壶口” (hukou) imagery with a technically accurate English equivalent. The noun “channel” appropriately replaces “河道” (river channel) in this context, and “spectacular” powerfully conveys “规模壮观” (large-scale and magnificent). The proper noun “Hukou Waterfall” maintains cultural authenticity while being immediately understandable to English readers. Each lexical choice serves to recreate the vivid picture of the original while adhering to English idiomatic expressions, achieving both accuracy and stylistic elegance.

Example 2

SL: 一个个高低不同、方向各异的石阶水瀑成为了这里的主角

TL: A series of cascades across these stone steps dominate the view along the river.

Appreciation: In Translational Communication Studies, the primary goal of translation is to accurately convey the original information for effective cross-cultural communication. The phrase “成为了这里的主角” in the original text highlights the significance of the landscape. The use of “dominate” in the translation is particularly ingenious. From a media perspective, the translation is accurate and concise. The phrase “a series of cascades” precisely conveys the concept of multiple waterfalls, while “across these stone steps” clearly indicates their spatial relationship. The language conforms to English usage, effectively transforming the source language information into the target language for dissemination. For the recipients, English speakers can intuitively understand that a series of waterfalls on the stone steps have become the eye-catching spectacle of the place. This concise and clear expression allows the audience to grasp the core content quickly without complex background knowledge, reducing comprehension difficulty. In terms of effect, the translation vividly depicts the scene of the stone-step waterfalls. The phrase “dominate the view” emphasizes their prominence, capturing the audience’s attention and sparking interest in this unique Yellow River landscape. It achieves the purpose of information transmission and landscape promotion, highlighting the charm of this local scenery in an English-speaking context.

3.2. Syntactic Level

Chinese syntax and phrases tend to be relatively loose, reflecting the Chinese preference for dialectical thinking. In contrast, English sentence structures are highly rigorous, emphasizing formal logic. Given this, when translating longer sentences, it is essential to focus on formal logic. Specifically, during the translation process, one can make greater use of subordinate clauses, “with” constructions, or inverted sentences. These structures help ensure that the translation is logically coherent and clear in its references. By adopting this approach, the translation can better conform to English expression habits, making it more natural and idiomatic. This method effectively enhances the quality of the translation, improving its readability and comprehensibility, thereby facilitating foreign readers’ understanding of

Yellow River culture.

Example 3

SL: 而经壶口和孟门流向龙门的黄河水,又再现了她的沉静与宽广。

TL: After passing through Hukou and Mengmen, the Yellow River, en route to Longmen, regains its tranquility and breadth.

Appreciation: From a syntactic perspective, the translation is fluent and natural. Phrases such as “After passing through...” and “en route to...” accurately construct the logical relationship between the locations the Yellow River flows through and its dynamic movements. These expressions conform to English norms and effectively convey the original information using English as the medium of communication. For the target audience, the clear wording allows English speakers to easily understand the journey and changes in the state of the Yellow River. The phrase “tranquility and breadth” precisely conveys the meaning of “沉静与宽广”, lowering the barrier to comprehension and enabling audiences from different cultural backgrounds to receive the information effectively. In terms of effect, the translation fully presents the key content of the original text, allowing the audience to intuitively perceive the characteristics of a specific section of the Yellow River. This helps to vividly portray the image of the Yellow River in cross-cultural communication, sparking the audience’s interest and curiosity in Yellow River culture. Consequently, it promotes broader dissemination and recognition of Yellow River culture on the international stage.

Example 4

SL: 黄河的水变得舒缓, 河水日夜不息地冲刷和雕刻着河道两岸, 并在河道两岸形成黄土塬、坪地和黄土柱。

TL: The Yellow River slows down, continuously eroding and sculpting its banks, forming loess plateaus, terraces, and loess pillars along the way.

Appreciation: The translation achieves both conciseness and rhetorical power, as evidenced by its precise lexical choices. The phrase “slows down” accurately expresses the meaning of “变得舒缓” while “continuously eroding and sculpting” vividly depicts the river’s impact on the riverbanks. Professional terms such as “loess plateaus,” “terraces,” and “loess pillars” precisely correspond to different types of terrain. By adhering to English grammatical norms, the translation effectively conveys the geographical information of the Yellow River through the medium of English. English speakers can clearly visualize the Yellow River’s shifting currents and their profound geomorphological impact on the surrounding landscape. The concise wording and commonly used vocabulary reduce the difficulty of comprehension, enabling them to quickly build an understanding of this characteristic of the Yellow River and bridge the gap between themselves and the translated information. The translation masterfully captures the Yellow River’s powerful dynamics and the distinctive geological formations carved by its relentless flow. This can arouse the audience’s interest in the geographical wonders of the Yellow River, enhance the appeal of Yellow River culture in cross-cultural

communication, and promote its image-building and cultural dissemination among international audiences, thereby increasing the international influence of Yellow River culture.

3.3. Rhetorical Level

Example 5

SL: 经过不足 40 米宽的禹门口后, 黄河告别了晋陕大峡谷。

TL: Reaching the less than 40-meter-wide Yumenkou, the Yellow River bids farewell to the Great Canyon of Jin-Shaanxi.

Revised Version: After passing through the less than 40-meter-wide Yumen Pass, the Yellow River leaves behind the Great Canyon of Shanxi and Shaanxi.

Appreciation: Comparing the original translation and the revised version, in terms of proper nouns, the original translation uses only the pinyin “Yumenkou” without geographical attributes, and the pinyin abbreviation “Jin-Shaanxi” is likely to cause confusion about the provinces. Functionally speaking, proper nouns denote specific people, events, places, institutions, and policies., etc. (Gu, 2005). The revised version translates “禹门口” as “Yumen Pass”, clarifying its “pass” attribute with “Pass”, and renders “晋陕大峡谷” as “Great Canyon of Shanxi and Shaanxi” using full provincial names to eliminate ambiguity, lowering the comprehension barrier. For personification, the original “bids farewell to”, mostly used in interpersonal scenarios, seems awkward. The revised “leaves behind” retains the personification while conforming to English conventions for describing natural landscapes, making it easier to arouse interest. In terms of syntactic logic and media adaptation, the original “Reaching” lacks the dynamic sense of “passing through”, leading to a logical gap. The revised “After passing through” clearly conveys the temporal sequence, adapts to the audio-visual characteristics of documentaries, and improves information reception efficiency.

Example 6:

SL: 在这里, 黄河将泥土还给大地, 将波涛融于海浪。

TL: Here, the Yellow River returns soil to the earth and merges its waves into the ocean.

Appreciation: The translation demonstrates lexical precision through its media-adapted wording, particularly evident in the exact correspondence between: “returns” and “还给”, and “merges” and “融于”. This precision extends to its standardized structure and the effective employment of the concise “Here...” sentence pattern, which adheres perfectly to English stylistic conventions. This effectively leverages the English language to accurately convey the original information, laying a solid foundation for cross-cultural communication. The translation employs reader-friendly phrasing that ensures immediate comprehension, allowing English speakers to effortlessly visualize both the dynamic actions and physical features associated with the Yellow River’s transformative power, lower-

ing the barrier to comprehension. This allows audiences from diverse cultural backgrounds to quickly receive information about the interaction between the Yellow River and the land or sea, facilitating the broad dissemination of cultural content. The translation effectively captures the dynamic behavior and morphological processes of the Yellow River system. Although the transmission of cultural imagery is somewhat lacking, it enables the audience to initially perceive the river's dynamics, sparking their curiosity and interest in the Yellow River. In cross-cultural communication, this helps enhance the river's recognition among international audiences and promotes the exchange and dissemination of Yellow River culture.

4. Conclusion

The insights gained from translating Yellow River culture have illuminated our exploration of disseminating this unique heritage to the world, opening up new horizons for cross-cultural communication. At the lexical level, the treatment of culturally specific terms is particularly innovative. Retaining pinyin and appending commonly used English definitions, as seen in the translation of “壶口瀑布” (Hukou Waterfall), serves as a prime example. This approach embeds a cultural pearl on the bridge of communication, retaining the luster of local culture while extending an olive branch for understanding. The precise selection of everyday words acts like a calibrated compass, making the translation straightforward and clear. Audiences can instantly grasp the key points without any barriers to comprehension.

In terms of syntax, the process involves mental gymnastics of adaptation and reshaping. Transitioning from Chinese to English, based on the preference for formal logic in English, skillfully employs subordinate clauses and complex structures to organize long sentences. This creates a broad thoroughfare for the flow of information, making the translation more rigorous and idiomatic. Foreign readers are thus equipped with a clear map, navigating smoothly through the profound corridors of Yellow River culture.

The rhetorical dimension also features some clever tactics. Retaining vivid rhetorical devices, such as personification, infuses the text with a soul, maximizing its appeal. The precise and standard use of words casts out a bait of curiosity. Even if the cultural imagery is not as rich, it still captures the audience's attention, successfully opening the door to cross-cultural communication and leading more people into the fascinating world of Yellow River culture.

Translating and disseminating Yellow River culture is a systematic project of profound significance. By applying translation and communication theories, developing scientific and rational translation strategies at the lexical, syntactic, and rhetorical levels, and integrating multi-channel communication and cross-cultural cooperation strategies, the international dissemination of Yellow River culture can be effectively enhanced. This, in turn, strengthens China's cultural soft power. In future practice, continuous exploration and innovation are essential. It

is crucial to cultivate more high-quality translation and cultural communication professionals to enable Yellow River culture to shine more brilliantly in the global cultural landscape. By doing so, more people around the world can understand, appreciate, and inherit the rich connotations and great spirit embedded in Yellow River culture

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Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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