



# A Study on the Translation Strategies of “Chinese Keywords” in International Publicity Texts From the Perspective of Eco-Translatology

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## Abstract

This article focuses on the translation effect of Keywords to understand China in international publicity texts, with attention paid to the different translation versions of these keywords. From the perspective of “three-dimensional” (communicative, cultural, and linguistic) adaptative selection and transformation in eco-translatology, the translation effect of “Chinese keywords” is mainly analyzed, and translations from different periods are compared to explore the experience and inspiration of successful international publicity translations.

**Key words:** International publicity translation; Keywords to understand China; Eco-translatology

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## INTRODUCTION

As China enters a new era of development, its attitude and voice continue to receive attention from the international community. Therefore, how to accurately

convey China’s attitude, tell the story of China to the international community, and express China’s position has become a vital task. At any time, the accuracy of the translation for political viewpoints is of pivotal importance. For example, the translation of 中国共产党与民主党派 into “The Communist Party and democratic parties” by the early Western media may lead to a misunderstanding of “opposition”. If it is translated into “other democratic parties”, the false impression of complete opposition between the Communist Party and democratic parties in the minds of foreigners can be weakened. (Huang Youyi, 2004) In addition, publicity texts, like other special texts, have unique characteristics. As a direct means of international publicity, the accurate translation of official documents such as the English translation of speeches by national figures, the Bilingual Edition of China Daily, and the English translation of government work reports not only helps to build China’s discourse system in the international community in the new era but also provides effective explanations and counterattacks when China is maliciously defamed. Therefore, it is necessary to carefully consider the expressions to ensure the accuracy of “information”. Based on the “three-dimensional” adaptation and transformation in eco-translatology, and specific case analysis, this article will select “Chinese keywords” with Chinese characteristics from international publicity texts, analyze the translation effects of “Chinese keywords” in different periods, explore scholars’ strategies for continuous improvement for the translation and provide inspiration for international publicity translation in the new era.

## 1. LITERATURE REVIEW OF CHINESE INTERNATIONAL PUBLICITY TRANSLATION

The research on Chinese international publicity translation can be traced back to the 1990s.

Zhang Shixuan proposed to fully utilize the role of translation in international publicity and proposed that international publicity translation should accurately express the content of the original text by fully understanding the original text and its content, instead of simple word match or sentence match. (Zhang, 1997). By searching the CNKI website for the terms “Keywords to understand China” and “international publicity translation”, it was found that most scholars focus on the translation methods and strategies of Keywords with Chinese characteristics (Gu, 2005; Fan, 2010; Zhang and Liu, 2017). Some took Newmark’s communicative translation theory, skopos theory, and functional equivalence theory as guidance (Dong, 2017; Wu, He, 2020), while other scholars mainly focus on the corpus from the translation of 《习近平谈治国理政》 (Qi, 2015; Dou, 2016). Therefore, from the perspective of eco-translatology, this article chooses translation from China’s leaders’ speeches, government work reports, and the “China Keywords” website, compares and analyzes keywords with Chinese characteristics from different periods, and compares different version of translation for the same vocabulary in government work reports over the years, in order to explore translation strategies for international publicity texts in the new era and provide inspiration for improving the translation of keywords with Chinese characteristics.

Translation itself, as a transcoding activity, is essentially aimed at expressing the information contained in the source language in the target language. The translation of political discourse is different from that of general cultural works. The translation of general cultural works mainly considers whether the main idea can be understood and felt, while for the translation of political discourse, the translators should not only focus on conveying the original information but also emphasize the acceptance of the target audience, including linguistic acceptance and political acceptance. (Dou, 2016). For example, some expressions used to provoke China’s Taiwan issue deliberately translated Chinese Mainland into “Mainland China” and juxtaposed it with “Taiwan”, giving people the misunderstanding that the mainland and Taiwan belong to different sovereign countries, which completely violates the one-China principle so that people can fall into the discourse trap. In all international publicity texts, China has translated 中国大陆 into “The Chinese Mainland”, and used “Chinese” to express “中国人, 中国的”, implying that China not only has the mainland but also includes other parts. This example demonstrates the sensitivity of political discourse translation and the importance of persevering our own discourse system.

The guiding principle of international publicity translation work that we are familiar with is the “three closeness” principle proposed by Huang Youyi, which is close to the development reality of China and the way of thinking and communicating of foreign audiences. He believes that in

order to do a good job in international publicity, it is necessary to consider cultural differences and be familiar with the language of the target audience to prevent falling into cultural traps. (Hu, 2014). In recent years, with the deterioration of the international situation, ideological struggles among countries have become increasingly fierce, and the voices of smearing China have become increasingly apparent internationally. Some scholars have proposed adopting a “self-centered” strategy to break away from the Western discourse system, construct a Chinese discourse system, and make “Chinese expression” recognized by the international community. Therefore, considering the sensitivity of international publicity texts and China’s current need to build an international discourse system, we should adopt the combined principle of the “three closeness” and the “self-centered” strategy. (Xiao and Shao, 2019)

The multilingual information dissemination platform of “Keywords to understand China” was jointly established by the China Foreign Language Bureau, the China Translation Association, and the China Translation Research Institute. It covers multiple sectors such as the “Chinese Spirit”, “Reform and Opening up”, and “Civilization Concept”, mainly focusing on the Party Central Committee’s concept of governing the country, China’s civilization concept, domestic and foreign policies, etc. It is an authoritative way for domestic and foreign scholars to understand China and understand its voice. Essentially, it is an authoritative and representative collection of Chinese characteristic vocabulary, as well as explanations and translations of frequently used allusions in international publicity. In terms of the translation of entries, the project brings together domestic experts who have rich experience in the field of foreign communication and translation practice, as well as foreign experts who fully understand the national conditions of China. Translation principles and standards have been formulated, and the operation strictly follows the standardized process of translation, review, and finalization. (Cai and Yang, 2017)

## 2. OVERVIEW OF ECO-TRANSLATOLOGY

The concept of Eco-Translatology was proposed by Hu Gengshen in 2001. He summarized Eco-Translatology as an ecological approach to translation research. This theory is based on Darwin’s evolutionary theory of “adaptation/selection”, metaphorically comparing translation ecology with natural systems, and conducting deeper systematic research on translation behavior. He proposed concepts such as “ecological paradigm”, “translation ecological environment”, “adaptation/selection”, and “three-dimensional transformation”, providing a new perspective for translation research. The basic theory of Eco-Translatology summarizes translation methods as a “three-dimensional” transformation, which focuses relatively on

the adaptive selection transformation of linguistic, cultural, and communicative dimensions. (Hu, 2011). Among these, “adaptive transformation of linguistic dimension” refers to the translator’s adaptive selection and transformation of language forms during the translation process, requiring the translator to “shell out” the source language and then express it accordingly in the target language. The adaptive selection and transformation of cultural dimension refers to paying attention to the transmission and interpretation of bilingual cultural connotations in the translation process, requiring translators to focus on resolving “cultural barriers” and deal with differences in cultural connotations and expressions between languages during the translation process. The “adaptive selection and transformation of communicative dimension” emphasizes the adaptive selection and transformation of bilingual communication intention during the translation process, and requires the translator to pay attention to whether the intention of the source language has been realized (Hu, 2008).

### 3. THE “THREE-DIMENSIONAL” ADAPTATION METHOD OF “KEYWORDS WITH CHINESE CHARACTERISTICS” IN DIFFERENT PERIODS

The “three-dimensional” adaptive transformation theory from the perspective of Eco-Translatology provides translators with a new tool to test the translation effect. In international publicity texts, various political discourses often contain “hidden meanings”, which require translators to accurately decode the meaning and convey the original information correctly. The following chapter will explore the translation methods and effects of some “keywords” in publicity texts from the perspectives of linguistic, cultural, and communicative dimensions.

#### 3.1. Adaptative Selection and Transformation from the Linguistic Dimension

The adaptive transformation in the linguistic dimension requires translators to “shell out” the source language and express it in the target language accordingly. The following article will focus on analyzing the information transmission effect of the translation of “Chinese keywords” with obvious Chinese characteristics.

Example 1: 精准扶贫、精准脱贫

Translation 1: targeted approach to alleviating poverty (keywords.china.org.cn, 2016)

Translation 2: targeted poverty alleviation and elimination (keywords.china.org.cn, 2021)

Firstly, the 2016 version of translation took into account the differences in language forms between Chinese and English. Based on the preference for noun structures in English, the translator made adaptive

choices and converted “扶贫” into gerunds. Moreover, the translation combines the meanings of “扶贫” and “脱贫”, both translated as “alleviating”, which is unreasonable from the current perspective. The current national standard for “脱贫” is that the annual per capita net income steadily exceeds 4000 yuan. As a measure to achieve “脱贫(poverty elimination)”, “扶贫 (poverty alleviation)” should be translated into “alleviating”, while “脱贫” should be translated as “eliminating”, respectively. The 2021 translation chose “elimination” to express “脱贫”, which better distinguishes the standard between “脱贫(poverty elimination)”, and “扶贫 (poverty alleviation)”. In the Cambridge Dictionary, the definition of “elimination” is “to remove or take away someone or something”, thus using “eliminate” could better express the meaning of meeting the standard of “脱贫”. In addition, in terms of adapting to the differences in language forms between Chinese and English in the 2021 translation, the term “targeted power allocation and elimination” used a noun phrase expression, which is more accurate and clearer.

#### 3.2 Adaptative Selection and Transformation from the Communicative Dimension

The adaptive selection and transformation in the communicative dimension require translators to pay attention to whether the communicative intention of the source language has been achieved. From the perspective of the information transmission effect, the communicative dimension mainly focuses on whether the original meaning has been misinterpreted, the cohesion of the translation discourse, and the acceptance level of the target language audience, in order to maintain a bilingual communication ecology.

Example 2: 绿水青山就是金山银山

Version 1: “Green mountains are gold mountains” (keywords.china.org.cn, 2018)

Version 2: “Green Mountains Are Mountains of Gold” (keywords.china.org.cn, 2019)

Version 3: “lucid waters and lush mountains are invaluable assets” (government report, 2021)

Repeatedly emphasized by the Chinese government, The ecological concept that “绿水青山就是金山银山 (lucid waters and lush mountains are invaluable assets)” often appears in various speeches and government work reports. For example, when this statement first appeared, it was mentioned: “We should not only pursue gold mountains and silver mountains, but also preserve green water and green mountains. We would rather maintain green water and green mountains than pursue the gold mountains, and green water and green mountains are actually mountains of gold.”

The original text aims to demonstrate China’s attitude and determination to vigorously promote the construction of ecological civilization. As a resounding “Chinese voice” raised by China on ecological and environmental

protection in the international community, the accuracy of this translation has a large impact on China’s international publicity. It can be seen that the main purpose of this discourse is to emphasize the need to protect “green water and green mountains”. The main message of this discourse is to emphasize the importance of protecting the ecological environment in the process of economic development. “It is better to have green water and green mountains than gold and silver mountains” reflects the determination to prioritize the importance of protecting the ecological environment before economic development. Translation 1 and Translation 2 both directly translate it as “Green mountains are gold mountains” and “Green mountains are Mountains of Gold”, which translates back to “绿色的山就是金山”. This version only translates “green mountains” and “gold mountains”, while completely ignoring the hidden information of “green water” and “silver mountains”. Although the structure of the original text was preserved during translation, the original meaning was not conveyed completely, and the idea that protecting the eco-environment is the meaning of pursuing economic development was not translated. In the meantime, it is easy for the international community to misunderstand it as ‘green mountains are gold mines’, conveying the meaning that we only need to protect ‘gold mines’, which still focus on economic development and not pay attention to environmental protection, thus contradicting the original meaning. In translation 3, the translator translates “green water” as “lucid waters (清澈的水)”, “green mountains” as “lush mountains (茂盛的山)”, and “gold mountains and silver mountains” as “invaluable assets”, which translates back to “清澈的水与茂盛的山是宝贵的财富”. This version adopts an explanatory translation, in which the “green water” is explained as “lucid water”, “Qingshan” as “lush mountains and forests”, and “gold mountains and silver mountains (金山银山)” is interpreted as “invaluable assets”. By using this explanatory method, the original meaning is accurately conveyed and the emphasis on protecting the ecological environment is clearly and accurately expressed, achieving the purpose of communication and avoiding unnecessary misunderstandings.

Example 3:: 以国内大循环为主体、国内国际双循环相互促进的新发展格局

Translation 1: a dual-cycle development architecture, which means its growth will rely on both domestic and international economics cycles, with domestic cycle as the mainstay. (2019)

Translation 2: a new pattern of development that is focus on the domestic economy and features positive interplay between domestic and international economic flows. (2022)

The “domestic circulation” and “domestic international dual circulation” are new statements put forward by Chinese leaders in the face of new situations in the new

era. Their main purpose is to clarify the issue of how China should develop in the face of deglobalization. In political terms, their main message is how the two “cycles” promote each other. Therefore, the focus of translation should be on conveying the new pattern featuring “mutual promotion”. In the 2019 version, the combination of “dual cycle (双循环)” and “development pattern (发展格局)” was translated as “a dual cycle development architecture”, supplemented by a clause, which can be translated back to Chinese as “中国的发展将主要依靠国内和国际循环，并以国内循环为主”. This does not convey a message of “mutual promotion”, but rather brings a “closed development” meaning to the international community. In terms of the effect of communicative intention, it contradicts the intention of the original text, bringing the opposite meaning of the source text. The 2022 translation has been improved from a communicative perspective, with attributive clauses explaining that the new development pattern mainly focuses on “domestic circulation” (domestic economic development), and later supplemented with “features positive interaction between domestic and international economic flows” to better explain the ‘mutual promotion’. The use of “flows” and “positive” here is very clever, emphasizing the “dynamic” and “mutually promoting” of domestic and foreign economic flows, accurately conveying China’s idea of opening up to the outside world, rather than misunderstandings about closed development. The focus of information transmission has been adjusted from the adaptation and transformation in the communication dimension, and attention has been paid to the “sensitivity” of political discourse translation in international publicity texts. It can be seen that rethinking the translation of Chinese keywords from the perspective of communicative dimension adaptation and transformation can effectively avoid misunderstandings of “new statements” and “new voices”, re-examine the translation focus, convey the original meaning, and correctly achieve communicative intention.

### 3.3 Adaptive Selection and Transformation from the Cultural Dimension

The adaptive selection and transformation in cultural dimension refer to the translator paying attention to the transmission and interpretation of bilingual cultural connotations during the translation process, which requires the translator to focus on resolving “cultural barriers”. Chinese leaders and national figures often cite scriptures and allusions in their speeches at various conferences. During the translation process, translators should have an understanding of the classics of their Chinese culture, adopt appropriate translation methods to correctly translate Chinese keywords such as “allusions” and colloquialism, reasonably resolve “cultural barriers”, and accurately convey the cultural information contained in the source language to the target language audience.

Example 4: 上善若水，水利万物而不争 (keywords.china.org.cn)

Translation: Great virtue is like water, which benefits all of creation without trying to compete with them.

Example 5: 只会使亚太经济合作进入“死胡同” (2022)

Translation: only lead Asia-Pacific economic cooperation to a dead end.

The saying “The great virtue is like water, which benefits all of creation without trying to compete with them.” Was quoted at the welcome dinner of the 22nd APEC Economic Leaders’ Meeting in Beijing in November 2014, in order to convey the hope for harmonious development in various regions. In this Translation, the translator adopts a literal translation strategy, in which the original text implies an explanation, while the latter half of the sentence serves as an explanation for the first half without the need for additional annotations. Example 5 comes from the speech at the 2022 APEC Business Leaders’ Summit, in which “dead end” means “an alley with only one entrance and exit”, which is a unique expression in Chinese culture. If foreign readers do not have a corresponding cultural background, it is difficult to understand its original meaning. Therefore, the translator breaks the cultural barriers from a cultural perspective and adopts a strategy of “cultural substitution”, by choosing an English idiom with the same meaning as the target language culture and translating it as a ‘dead end’. For the translation of cultural allusions, translators should adopt appropriate translation strategies like the above example, combining the “three closeness” principle with the “self-centered” translation principle in the new era, in order to avoid situations where allusion translations are maliciously misunderstood. Rethinking keywords with Chinese characteristics and cultural connotations from the perspective of cultural adaptive selection is a powerful tool for checking translation, improving our international publicity ability, and correctly conveying the Chinese voice.

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## 4. ENLIGHTENMENT FROM DIFFERENT TRANSLATIONS IN DIFFERENT PERIODS

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### 4.1 Translators Should Pay More Attention to Current Affairs

From the analysis of the diachronic translation of “精准扶贫、精准脱贫” above, it can be seen that China’s international publicity translation requires translators to continuously deepen their understanding of the actual policies, keep up with current events, and closely connect with reality. In 2016, the slogan of poverty alleviation was proposed, with the official translation being “alleviating

poverty”. With the deepening development of poverty alleviation, the country has clearer standards for “poverty elimination (脱贫)” and distinguishes it from the meaning of “poverty alleviation (扶贫)”. Translators also need to make adjustments based on current politics to provide clearer translations that are in line with specific reality and avoid incorrect voices and ambiguity. Therefore, as we are entering a new era, translators should pay more attention to the current affairs.

### 4.2 Translators Should Enhance Their Political Sensitivity

From the diachronic translations of “(绿水青山就是金山银山) lucid waters and lush mountains are invaluable assets” and “(国内国际双循环) domestic and international dual circulation”, it can be seen that to correctly convey the meaning in political discourse, translators are gradually inclined towards adopting a “semi foreignization” literal translation with annotations, that is, retaining the cultural images in the original language and then explaining the implied meaning. In addition, regarding the diachronic analysis of the translations, a clear trend is that more positive vocabularies (such as “positive interplay”) are used to reduce the possibility of malicious misinterpretation. When it comes to establishing the national image, translators are required to pay more consideration to the specific meaning of “keywords”, such as the translation of various “(战) battles/wars”, “battle against the pandemic (疫情保卫战)”, “battles against poverty alleviation(脱贫攻坚战)”, situations when all people pull together as the Party leads the people to face difficulties, they are generally translated as “battles”, highlighting the efforts and struggles of the Party and the people. In contrast, when translating environmental slogans, restrictions on corporate emissions, and new requirements, such as the translation of “Making China’s Sky Blue Again(蓝天保卫战)”, the term “战” cannot be translated as “battles” or “wars”. The purpose of the policies was to restrict enterprises and strengthen law enforcement, rather than establishing an image of “opposition”. Therefore, it is best to translate it as “Making China’s Sky Blue Again” to avoid malicious interpretation (a Chinese keyword). Concluded from such a case, it is imperative for translators to be keenly aware of the political sensitivity and translate those keywords properly.

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## CONCLUSION

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This article analyzes the translation of “Chinese keywords” in international publicity texts from the perspective of the “three-dimensional” adaptive selection and transformation theory in eco-translatology, based on the translation versions from keywords.china.org.cn (中国关键词) and the latest English translation of government work reports. From the “three-dimensional” perspective, it is found that nowadays, the translation of

keywords with Chinese characteristics in international publicity texts adopt a “connotation+translation” strategy, that is, the method of translating texts while retaining the cultural images with Chinese characteristic, which demonstrated the organic combination of the principle of “three closeness” and the principle of “self-centered”. Therefore, as China develops by leaps and bounds into the new era, translators are facing more demands, paying more attention to current politics to improve their understanding of policies, and enhancing political sensitivity.

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