



# Research on the English Translation Strategies for the Subtitle of the News Documentaries in the Context of "Chinese Culture Going Outside" - A Case Study of "the CPC Way"

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**Abstract:** Documentary communication plays a significant role in strengthening international communication capacities. Documentaries are easily understood and recognized by people from diverse cultural backgrounds due to their credibility, appeal, and artistry. Under the background of Chinese culture "going outside", domestic documentaries bear the heavy responsibility of exporting excellent traditional culture and promoting the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation. As a cultural and artistic provider, it displays a truly three-dimensional and comprehensive image of China, and is devoted to telling Chinese stories well and spreading Chinese voices. The documentary text has information that directly reflects the corresponding culture, which makes its subtitles an effective carrier of cultural transmission. This paper takes the news documentary "the CPC Way" as a case study, which analyzes the current situation of translating news documentary subtitles, discusses the challenges involved in documentary translation and proposes appropriate translation strategies. With the aim of encouraging more scholars to pay attention to the translation of documentary subtitles, in order to help Chinese culture "going outside".

**Keywords:** Chinese culture "going outside", documentary, cross-cultural communication

## I. Introduction

During the Sixth Plenary Session of the 19th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China session, the Resolution on the Major Achievements and Historical Experience of the Party over the Past Century was reviewed and approved by the Central Committee. It states that we will accelerate our international communication capacity and tell the story of China and the CPC well to the world in order to promote the soft power of China's culture and increase its influence. The creation and dissemination of documentary is an important part of strengthening international communication. Documentaries are easily understood and recognized by people from diverse cultural backgrounds because of their credibility and appeal. For years, it developed into a true three-dimensional and comprehensive image of China, which was crucial for telling Chinese stories effectively.

"The CPC Way" was produced by China International Television. Since August 26, 2021, it has been broadcast simultaneously on new media platforms such as CGTN English, Spanish, French, Arabic, CGTN News, and CCTV. Starting from a small aspect, it presents the development history of the Communist Party of China in a global perspective. With 95 million members, the CPC is now the biggest political party in the world. In only 100 years, it has brought the country from humiliation by invaders to become the world's second largest economy. The series uses archives for historical reference and interviews with over 50 party members in different occupations all across the country. "The CPC Way" provides different perspectives of the CPC to overseas viewers. Some of the stories are being reported for the very first time. It shows the history of the Communist Party of China's unremitting struggle to achieve national independence, and exemplifies the Communist Party's idea of maintaining world peace and creating a community that has a shared future for mankind.

## II. Literature Review

The author sorted out the papers on documentary translation strategies published on CNKI and classified their main contents. Using the keyword "documentary translation strategy", a total of 108 articles were obtained on CNKI, of which 24 were academic journals and 76 were dissertation papers. There are 60 documentaries as case studies, which are classified into food, physical geography, science, biography and history. The research perspectives include ecological translation, functional equivalence theory, cultural translation view, interpretive theory, cultural default and compensation. In addition to case studies, there are also commonly conducted studies on document translation strategies. No literature was retrieved from CNKI using the keyword "news documentary translation strategy".

Different theories and perspectives are utilized by scholars at home and abroad to conduct research on documentary subtitle translation. Xu Feng examined and talked about documentary subtitle translation with cognitive translation theory, and compiled his summary of the impact of this theory on subtitle translation<sup>[1]</sup>; Zhang Yun believes that using skopos theory to guide documentary translation can convey the cultural connotations of the source language to the

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target audience<sup>[2]</sup>. The strategies and principles of documentary subtitle translation have been highlighted by some scholars. Ye Lu & Yang Ting pointed out that subtitle translation should follow three principles :faithfulness, elegance and conciseness<sup>[3]</sup>. Wu Meng believes that the translators should break through the translation concept of semantic equivalence, and fully consider the heterogeneity between two cultures and the reception effect of foreign audiences from the perspective of cultural communication<sup>[4]</sup>.

Chinese documentary serves not only as an essential vehicle for the construction of advanced socialist culture, but also as a crucial platform for implementing Chinese culture "going outside". Some Chinese documentaries have made good achievements in international communication, but compared to foreign documentaries, the status quo of Chinese documentaries "going outside" is still not optimistic. According to a survey of respondents' views on Chinese documentaries conducted at University College in London, some respondents believe that the biggest obstacle to their acceptance of Chinese documentaries is not the subject, production level, or political views, but rather the translation. Translation is the most influential factor when it comes to the acceptance of Chinese documentaries overseas, followed by subject matter and political views<sup>[5]</sup>.

Translation serves as a bridge between cultures. Due to the different characteristics of the culture in the East and the West, the documentary subtitle translation is essentially a cross-cultural communication behavior, which directly affects the audiences' acceptance attitude towards documentary. Therefore, documentary subtitle translation has become a top priority for the overseas dissemination of Chinese documentaries, and the quality of subtitle translation plays a pivotal role in the process of the Chinese culture "going outside".

### III. The Translation Strategies of " the CPC Way "

According to the "three approaches" principle of external communication proposed by Huang Youyi<sup>[6]</sup>: the principle is to remain closely connected to the reality of China's development, the demand of foreign audiences for Chinese information, and their thinking habits. The best translation is to adjust the Chinese source text according to the thinking patterns of foreign audiences instead of mechanically converting Chinese word for word into foreign languages. As a bridge to communicate across cultures, different translation strategies should be employed in the process of translating documentaries and different translation methods should be selected according to the acceptability of target language audiences under the guidance of documentaries.

#### (I) The Title Translation

The translation of documentary titles that contain Chinese language-specific words can be a challenge. It provides clues for the development of the story and paves the way for the following content. A good title in translation can not only attract readers' attention, but also arouse readers' minds. The failure to translate these titles correctly is a significant factor that causes foreign audiences to reject Chinese documentaries and decreases the success rate of "going outside".

##### i. The Title Translation of “活力密码”

The title translation needs to be concise and easy to remember. The essence of the source language will be missed if the title “活力密码” is translated into "the secret of the vitality" literally. The documentary "The CPC Way" uses its English title to vividly illustrate the history of the Communist Party of China. The use of this translation can not only arouse the curiosity of English-speaking audiences about the CPC, but also make sure that the target language audience understands the main content of this documentary in an intuitive manner.

##### ii. The Subtitle Translation for Every Episode

The title is the soul of the documentary, which reflects the highly refined content and the sublimation of the theme. Whether the translation of the title is scientific, accurate, and vivid directly determines the communication power, influence, and vitality of the record in foreign countries. In order to convey the rich content information and artistic aesthetic value, it is necessary to use the most concise language during the title translation process. These familiar terms were used by the translator as the title of each episode. It can not only arouse the interest of foreign audiences, but also leave a familiar feeling from the title.

| Episode       | Source Language | Target Language         |
|---------------|-----------------|-------------------------|
| Episode One   | 不忘初心            | The Original Aspiration |
| Episode Two   | 人民至上            | Putting People First    |
| Episode Three | 解放思想            | Emancipating the Mind   |
| Episode Four  | 自我革命            | Self-Reform             |
| Episode Five  | 生生不息            | The Members             |
| Episode Six   | 命运共同            | Global Actor            |

Table 1 *The Title Translation for Each Episode*

Considering the acceptance of audiences from other countries, literal translation can be used to translate the title if the words have the same reference and meaning in both Chinese and English. In this way, the unfamiliar images were transformed into their familiar images, and the interests of the target audiences were aroused. It is conducive to promoting harmonious relationships between the two cultures.

## (II) The Translation of the Words with Chinese Characteristics

Words with Chinese characteristics refer to the unique and the national characteristics of words that originate from China. These words have certain characteristics of the time and the connotation of Chinese national culture. The documentary "The CPC Way" primarily focuses on idioms and culture-loaded words that have Chinese characteristics.

### i. The Translation of the Chinese Idioms

Idioms play an important role in the communication of human beings and are a significant part of the general vocabulary of languages<sup>[7]</sup>. Chinese idioms are mainly composed of four characters, which are highly summarized in stories, allusions and works, with tight structure and incisive meaning. Idioms are the crystallization of the Chinese people's perception and wisdom of life, and they are also a common expression in the propaganda texts. Idiom translation is not only a language conversion, but also the transplantation of culture. Due to the historical and cultural background, traditional customs and ways of thinking, which are very different from one country to another, the image, meaning and the use of idioms are also quite different.

The use of idioms in publicity documentaries can not only naturally and appropriately narrow the distance between the government and the people, but also spread Chinese culture around the world. To enhance the target language audience's understanding of the documentary, the translator chose the suitable translation for the four-character idioms in the source text.

| Episode      | Time   | Source Language | Target Language                         |
|--------------|--------|-----------------|---|
| Episode One  | 26:31  | 星星之火，可以燎原       | a single spark can start a prairie fire |
| Episode Two  | 14:04  | 不务正业            | don't take care of business             |
| Episode Two  | 28:05  | 抛头露面            | get involved in public affairs          |
| Episode Four | 26: 35 | 了如指掌            | know...inside out                       |
| Episode Six  | 11: 53 | 同舟共济            | we are all in the same boat             |
| Episode Six  | 11: 54 | 守望相助            | helping each other                      |

Table 2 *The Translation of the Chinese Idioms*

### ii. The Translation of the Culture-Loaded Words

The unique features of Chinese culture are directly reflected in these Chinese culture-loaded words and expressions. The translation of culture-loaded words is an important way to spread Chinese culture overseas. In Zheng Dehu's opinion, Chinese culture-loaded words carry the rich tradition of Chinese culture and represent the most fundamental external expression of traditional culture<sup>[8]</sup>. The translation of culture-loaded words plays an important role in spreading Chinese culture and promoting the communication between Chinese and Western cultures. Finding an exact equivalent expression when translating can be a challenge due to the significant differences between English and Chinese culture. Eugene Nida observed that translation is ultimately a matter of equivalence, which can be achieved through five factors: ecology, material culture, social culture, religious culture, and linguistic culture<sup>[9]</sup>. Susan Bassnett believes that cross-cultural communication and transformation can only be accomplished by fully considering the cultural factors behind the language in translation<sup>[10]</sup>.

| Episode       | Time   | Source Language | Target Language   |
|---------------|--------|-----------------|---|
| Episode Two   | 5:17   | 家庭联产承包责任制       | new household responsibility contract system                          |
| Episode Two   | 14:56  | 乡村振兴            | rural vitalization  |
| Episode Two   | 15:18  | 脱贫攻坚政策          | poverty alleviation policy  |
| Episode Two   | 19:27  | 建档立卡贫困户         | registered poor household   |
| Episode Three | 6:17   | 中国特色社会主义先行示范区   | a pilot demonstration zone for socialism with Chinese characteristics |
| Episode Six   | 32: 19 | 经济特区            | special economic zones  |

Table 3 *The Translation of the Culture-Loaded Words*

In the process of translation, it is necessary to pay full attention to the cultural connotations of the loaded words and adopt translation methods such as literal translation, transliteration, literal translation and annotations. The interaction between translation and text narrative creates context for understanding culture-loaded words, which promotes the extraterritorial dissemination of Chinese culture. This strategy can not only help Western readers to understand Chinese culture-loaded words, but also retain the connotations of culture-loaded words, so as to promote the extraterritorial dissemination of Chinese culture and the interaction and integration of Chinese and Western cultures. In the era of Chinese culture "going outside", a new and positive attitude towards Chinese culture can be achieved by translating culture-loaded words into English and making it stand out in the world of culture. It is an effective way for Chinese culture to present its traditional culture abroad by foreignizing it with text narration.

### (III) The Translation of the Sentence

Documentary film subtitles generally require a maximum of two lines of text per group of pictures, and each line of text should not be over 35 words. Source language subtitles must strictly correspond to the narration or dialogue, and each line of subtitles usually appears on the screen for 1 to 3 seconds. Translators must use translation strategies flexibly to present the most important information to the audience. In order to achieve good communication effects, translators use different translation strategies, which are embodied in literal translation, domestication and foreignization. The alternate use of three translation strategies can not only convey Chinese culture, but also be easily accepted and understood by the audience.

#### i. Achieve the Purpose of "Going Outside" through Literal Translation

Literal translation is one of the most commonly used translation methods. The most significant aspect of literal translation is that it faithfully conveys the content of the source text and retains the style of the source text. Not only are Chinese customs and traditional cultural features preserved by this method, but also some Chinese structural features.

| Episode       | Time  | Source Language                        | Target Language   |
|---------------|-------|--|---|
| Episode One   | 14:32 | 我们的目标就是把这种蓝领工人变成白领工人，让他们的工作更加有钱、有闲、有趣。 | Our goal is to turn blue-collar workers into white collars and make their work more profitable and enjoyable. |
| Episode Two   | 38:24 | 人民至上，生命至上。                             | People first. Life first.   |
| Episode Three | 19:11 | 没有共产党就没有新中国                            | Without the Communist Party, there will be no New China.  |
| Episode four  | 8:19  | 三反、五反运动                                | "Three Antis campaign", "Five Antis" campaign   |

Table 4 Examples of Literal Translation

#### ii. Achieve the Purpose of "Going Outside" through Domestication

Domestication translation strategy is the main approach taken in this documentary. Domestication is aimed at minimizing the alienness of foreign texts and cultures to target language readers in a clear manner. The most effective cultural effect can be achieved with the use of simplified target language as the medium and the foreign audience as the target audience.

| Episode      | Time  | Source Language    | Target Language                      |
|--------------|-------|--------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Episode One  | 24:22 | 他说要精打细算，每一分钱要用在刀刃上 | He managed to make every cent count. |
| Episode One  | 30:42 | 信天游                | the soaring folk melodies            |
| Episode Five | 36:00 | 方舱                 | temporary hospital                   |

Table 5 Examples of Domestication

The source text's content can be conveyed through the expressions used by target language readers. The translator needs to get closer to the target readers and speak in the same way as the author. To have a direct dialogue with the readers, the original author must use an authentically native translation. Naturalized translation enhances the readability and appreciation of the target text by helping readers better understand it.

#### iii. Achieve the Purpose of "Going Outside" through Foreignization

Foreignization means preserving the original meaning and connotation while breaking the daily translation form. Many translators restrict themselves to the translation rules, which results in some issues with the translated works. Examples of such issues include a vague concept, unclear original meaning, the ability to create differences and misunderstandings, a lack of exotic flavor, and the loss of original cultural customs. In order to avoid these defects, translators can not completely follow the norms of the source language, but retain the cultural connotation and style of the original as much as possible, and achieve a high degree of consistency with the meaning and style of the source text through breakthroughs in expression forms.

| Episode      | Time  | Source Language | Target Language                           |
|--------------|-------|-----------------|---|
| Episode Two  | 27:06 | 女特战队员不是花瓶。      | Female Marines are not just flower vases. |
| Episode Four | 1:56  | 一连串的“老虎”和“苍蝇”   | a succession of "tigers" and "flies"      |

Table 6 Examples of Foreignization

The purpose of using foreignization is to consider the differences between national culture, preserve and reflect the characteristics of foreign nationalities and language styles, and maintain the exotic taste for readers. The documentary "The CPC Way" uses a large number of figures of speech, such as metaphors, which can be translated in different ways. Peter Newmark<sup>[1]</sup> recommends that the strategy for handling metaphors in the source text is determined by the specific situation. If the figurative body of the source language can be found in the target language, or if the literal figurative body is easy to understand in the target language, moreover, the image is in line with the meaning of the figurative

body, the method of reproducing the same image in the source text can be used for translation. For example, the word “花瓶” used in the sentence “女特战队员不是花瓶” refers to a person who has a beautiful appearance but lacks talent. “花瓶” is identical to "flower vase" in figurative body, image and metaphorical meaning. The Chinese word “老虎” and “苍蝇” was interpreted in the same way as "tigers" and "flies".

#### IV. Conclusion

This paper takes the news documentary "the CPC Way" as a case study, which analyzes the current situation of translating news documentary subtitles, discusses the challenges involved in documentary translation and proposes appropriate translation strategies. From the perspective of "going out" of Chinese culture, The English translation of news documentaries requires a variety of translation strategies to be flexible and use different translation methods for different content. In addition, it is necessary to consider factors such as audience acceptance and cross-cultural awareness. The objective of this is to promote the audiences' understanding of different cultures, enhance the understanding of Chinese culture by people all over the world, and expand Chinese culture "going outside".

First of all, in the process of English translation of domestic documentaries, in addition to combining the source language text and following the expression habits of the target language, it is necessary to adopt a variety of translation strategies, analyze specific words and sentences, and select appropriate translation methods to ensure that the cultural information and cultural artistic conception contained in the documentary can be conveyed. In this way, documentary can realize its mission and responsibility of "telling Chinese stories well" and "spreading the voice of China well".

Secondly, the translator should have an accurate understanding of readers' needs for documentary translation. The service object of the translator is the target language audience, and the translator must fully fulfill their needs, understand their artistic interests and culture. The target audience is one of the key elements of successful translation. It is only by understanding and studying the needs of audiences that we are able to ensure that the translated version is accepted by them.

Last but not least, cultural awareness is a significant factor in translation. It is essential that the translator identify cultural similarities and differences in English and Chinese expressions. Cross-cultural intertextuality is directly related to the viewing experience of the target audiences. Therefore, the translator needs an awareness of the different patterns of thinking between two cultures in the translation process.

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