

The Role Positioning and Competency Development of Bilingual Hosts in the Context of Cross-Cultural Communication: A Case Study of CGTN Hosts

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ABSTRACT

As a medium for cross-cultural communication, bilingual hosts bear the important mission and responsibility of telling China's story well and spreading China's voice. This paper first analyzes the dual practical dilemmas of the interplay between the "other-shaped" and "self-shaped" national image in the process of cross-cultural communication, and the conflict between "one-way communication" and "two-way interaction" in the media. Then, analyze the role positioning of bilingual hosts from four dimensions: storytellers of China, interpreters of the national position, dialoguers of civilizational exchanges, and practitioners of public diplomacy. Finally, it was explained that bilingual hosts should strengthen the development of political literacy, cultural literacy, professional literacy, and media literacy in the process of cross-cultural communication. I hope this will provide some insight into the career path of bilingual hosts.

KEYWORDS

Cross-cultural communication; Bilingual host; Role positioning; Competency building

1 Introduction

"We must tell China's story well, spread the voice of the times, show the world a true, three-dimensional, and comprehensive China, and enhance the country's cultural soft power and the influence of Chinese culture." This important statement has provided clear direction for China's cultural outreach abroad. "Telling China's story well" is not only an important means of disseminating mainstream values in China, but also a way for China to actively engage in cultural exchange and communication with other countries. It is of great significance for shaping a positive national image and enhancing China's international voice. However, in the complex process of cross-cultural communication, we face many practical difficulties. On the one hand, there is a phenomenon of "external shaping" of the country's image. Some Western media outlets, based on their own positions and interests, have created a one-sided image of China, leading to a certain degree of misunderstanding about China in the international community. On the other hand, the "one-way communication" model of traditional media is unable to meet the needs of cross-cultural communication today. The lack of interactivity and timeliness in information dissemination makes it difficult for China's voice to reach its target audience accurately and effectively. Therefore, how bilingual hosts can position themselves and strengthen their multidimensional literacy to tell Chinese stories well and achieve cross-cultural communication is an urgent issue that needs to be considered.

2 The real challenges of cross-cultural communication

2.1 The interplay between "external shaping" and "self-shaping" of national image

A country's image is a reflection of its comprehensive national strength. With the advancement of economic globalization and the widespread use of information and communication technology, the shaping and dissemination of national image has gradually transcended traditional boundaries and become a focal point in international relations and cultural exchanges. The construction of a national image is an extremely complex undertaking, primarily carried out through two methods: "self-shaping" and "other-shaping." It is a two-way interactive process (Qi, 2023)^[1]. In other words, national image requires not only active statements by the self, but also involves the cognitive judgments of others. It is a combination of self-cognition and other-cognition. It is evident that cross-cultural communication of China's image involves not only self-representation by China as the communicator, but also the construction of China's image from the perspective of other countries as the recipients of communication. However, given the differences between the economic base and the superstructure, there is often a discrepancy between China's "self-image" and its "image as perceived by others."

2.2 The conflict between "one-way communication" and "two-way interaction" in the media

With changes in the media environment, the linear communication model of one-way output is unable to meet the

audience's growing demand for diverse interaction. In a one-way communication model, information is dominated by the communicator, passively received by the audience, and the communication path is fixed, such as traditional television and radio. This model ensures efficient and large-scale information transmission and guarantees consistency and authority of content, but lacks audience feedback mechanisms, making it difficult to understand the audience's true thoughts and needs, and easily leading to "blind spots" in information dissemination. The two-way interactive model gives audiences the right to express themselves. They can provide real-time feedback and even participate in content creation, such as on social media and live streaming. It enhances audience engagement and a sense of belonging. Therefore, there is an urgent need to construct a new model of cross-cultural communication that promotes two-way interaction and mutual influence (Liu, 2025)^[2].

3 The role of bilingual hosts in the context of cross-cultural communication

3.1 The storyteller of China

"Telling China's story well, spreading China's voice well, and presenting a true, three-dimensional, and comprehensive image of China are important tasks in strengthening our international communication capabilities." Chinese stories are a record of the life of the Chinese nation, covering many aspects such as its long and splendid history and civilization, its impressive achievements in construction, its profound traditional culture, and the spirit of the Chinese people. Telling Chinese stories well is an important means of shaping China's image, enhancing its international discourse power, and strengthening value recognition. As a bridge and link in the process of disseminating Chinese culture abroad, bilingual hosts play an important role as storytellers of China.

In CGTN's special program "Between Near and Far," bilingual host Liu Xin visited Quanzhou City in Fujian Province and told the stories of four young people who came to mainland China from Taiwan. In CGTN's special program "Between Near and Far," bilingual host Liu Xin visited Quanzhou City in Fujian Province and told the stories of four young people who came to mainland China from Taiwan. In Quanzhou city, she visited the snack shops of young entrepreneurs Zheng Chuan Yang and Cheng Yaoyu, interviewing them to uncover their entrepreneurial journeys and their recognition of the value of the mainland. At a food processing plant in northern Quanzhou, the story of Yang Qiwei, general manager of Fujian Rongqi Food Group Co., Ltd., and the development of the factory show the strong sense of identification that young entrepreneurs have with the preferential policies of mainland China and their confidence in the integration and development of people on both sides of the Taiwan Strait. In the village of Baiqi in Quanzhou, she visited the family temple of music teacher Guo Yiqing and recounted the story of the Guo family's search for their roots, awakening the collective memory of the clan. Host Liu Xin converses with the protagonist of the story in Chinese and explains the historical and cultural background of the story in English. The combination of conversational and narrative styles of language is used to tell Chinese stories.

3.2 Interpreter of the national position

A national position refers to the fundamental attitude and interests that a country upholds as a sovereign entity in handling domestic and foreign affairs. It is typically manifested through core values, social systems, and national security strategies established by the constitution and legal system. China's national position is mainly reflected in safeguarding national sovereignty, respecting international law, and promoting the building of a community with a shared future for mankind. In the process of cross-cultural communication, bilingual hosts should use both linguistic and cultural decoding to objectively explain China's national position to audiences in international dialogues.

In the 2019 live broadcast between Chinese and American hosts, Liu Xin's performance also set an excellent example of how bilingual hosts can interpret their country's position in cross-cultural communication. For example, when Tracy brought up the issue of tariffs and core issues in US-China trade, Liu Xin responded, "Lowering tariffs is a good idea. That way, American consumers can buy Chinese goods at lower prices, and China can also buy American goods at lower prices. If one side wants to change the rules, it must obtain the consensus of the relevant parties. The US cannot treat China differently. Lowering tariffs must be a multilateral joint decision." This response respects the US position while firmly articulating China's national stance on safeguarding its interests and promoting economic globalization, presenting a balanced and objective image of China to the international audience.

3.3 Dialogue partners in civilizational exchange

Civilizations communicate because of their diversity, learn from each other through communication, and develop through mutual learning. Civilizational exchanges and mutual learning refer to strengthening exchanges and mutual learning between different civilizations, and achieving "beauty in harmony" through "appreciating the beauty of others."

As a medium for cultural exchange and mutual learning, bilingual hosts should leverage their linguistic advantages to seamlessly switch between languages, facilitating cultural exchange and mutual learning through dialogue.

Take CGTN's documentary series "Why Civilization" as an example. Host Xu Qinduo interviews domestic experts such as historian Wang Gengwu, Professor Yu Dan from Beijing Normal University, and Gong Wen, director of the Chinese Archaeology Museum. They analyze Chinese civilization from various perspectives, including its continuity, the iterative patterns of its institutional and cultural development, and the evolution and continuity of Chinese characters from ancient times to the present. At the same time, the host also interviewed foreign experts such as Colin Renfrew, archaeologist at Cambridge University, Martin Jacques, renowned British expert on China, and David Ferguson, winner of the Chinese Government Friendship Award, to discuss the inclusiveness of Chinese civilization and its contribution to the world. Bilingual hosts break down language barriers and present international scholars' research on Chinese civilization through dialogue, systematically explaining the five characteristics of Chinese civilization—continuity, innovation, unity, inclusiveness, and peacefulness—and their historical and contemporary significance, thereby achieving mutual learning and exchange between civilizations.

3.4 Practitioners of public diplomacy

The term "public diplomacy" can be traced back to 1965, when Edmund Green, then dean of the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University, coined it at the launch of the Edward R. Murrow Center for Public Diplomacy at the school. He defines it as: "Public diplomacy aims to address the impact of public attitudes on the formation and implementation of government foreign policy." The Dictionary of International Relations compiled by the US State Department defines public diplomacy as "a form of diplomacy supported by a country's government that influences the public of other countries through publications, films, cultural exchanges, radio, and television." It is clear that public diplomacy targets the general public and aims to gain support for a country's foreign policy through public opinion (Gao, 2005)^[3]. As key communicators in international media, bilingual hosts possess a natural advantage and professional expertise in cross-cultural communication. They should be adept at monitoring international public opinion trends, leveraging their solid language skills, extensive knowledge base, and excellent communication skills, they should skillfully guide public opinion through diplomatic discourse. In the collision and exchange of diverse cultures, they should use sincere, objective, and compelling expressions to "speak for the nation" through dialogue, enabling the world to gain a more comprehensive and in-depth understanding of China's stance and attitude, and creating a favorable international public opinion environment for the nation's diplomatic endeavors.

For example, in 2024, CGTN anchor Wang Guan appeared on France's national television program "Debate" to discuss China-France and China-Europe relations. When asked about the claim that "the world cannot absorb China's excess capacity," Wang Guan responded, "I think it is a mistake to blame China for excess capacity. About 80% of German cars are exported, but no one says that Germany has excess capacity." At the same time, he emphasized that "China's production is more efficient, lower in cost, and higher in quality." As a practitioner of public diplomacy, Wang Guan used a wealth of data and facts to express China's position and explain its consistent commitment to peaceful development. After the program aired, it presented a balanced, objective, and multidimensional image of China to foreign audiences, winning international recognition and support for China.

4 The development of bilingual hosts' competencies in the context of cross-cultural communication

4.1 Political literacy

The political literacy, theoretical knowledge, policy understanding, and professional competence of the news and public opinion work team directly affect the effectiveness of the Party's news and public opinion work. The fundamental attribute of broadcasting and hosting work is its news-oriented nature. As news professionals, broadcasters and hosts must enhance their political literacy and cultivate their political integrity. As a medium for cross-cultural communication, bilingual hosts should strengthen their political theory studies.

Bilingual hosts must ensure that their broadcasts and creative work align with national development needs and mainstream values, maintaining a consistent and appropriate direction whether communicating domestically or engaging in international exchanges. For example, when reporting on major national policies and important events, it is necessary to accurately convey their spirit and positive significance. In international communication, when faced with different political views and voices, it is necessary to firmly uphold national interests and image, and not be swayed by erroneous trends.

4.2 Cultural literacy

Communication scholar Edward Hall proposed two cultural models in his book *Beyond Culture*. A high-context culture is one in which the transmission of information depends on a specific contextual environment. In contrast, a low-context culture primarily relies on information encoding to achieve information transmission. In the process of communication and expression, people from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds exhibit certain differences. People in high-context cultures tend to use subtle and indirect expressions, while people in low-context cultures are accustomed to direct and frank communication. Bilingual hosts should enhance their cultural literacy in high-low context translation and discourse restructuring based on the cultural characteristics and cultural patterns of different countries. Through daily accumulation, they should gain a deep understanding of the core traits and subtle differences of high-low context cultures in various countries. In cross-cultural communication practices, they should flexibly apply translation techniques to precisely restructure discourse according to the target cultural context, ensuring that expressions retain their original meaning while aligning with local cultural norms. This approach effectively breaks down cultural barriers, and achieve smooth and in-depth cross-cultural communication.

In the 2019 live broadcast between Chinese and American hosts, Liu Xin's performance provided an excellent example of "context transcoding" and "discourse restructuring" in foreign media broadcasting. For example, Tracy asked, "In 2016, China imposed an average tariff of 9.9% on US goods, which is almost three times the rate imposed by the US. What do you think about this?" Liu Xin replied, "I think it's a great idea, don't you? I mean, for US consumers, goods from China will be cheaper, and for Chinese consumers, goods from the US will also be much cheaper." This response skillfully replaces high-context textual descriptions with clear low-context language, transforming the tense atmosphere of "confrontation" into a humorous "dialogue." While ensuring natural and accurate context conversion, it achieves deep cross-cultural communication.

4.3 Professional literacy

Professional competence is the basic requirement for bilingual hosts to engage in cross-cultural communication. Bilingual hosts should use standard Mandarin and English correctly, and accurately apply the three internal techniques of situational reproduction, object sense, and internal language, as well as the four external techniques of tone, stress, pause, and rhythm in broadcasting. At the same time, they should use paralinguistic elements appropriately to convey information accurately and without error.

In broadcasting, tone is an important technique in spoken language expression. It is the sound form that governs sentences in the context of the movement of thoughts and emotions (Zhang, 2022) ^[4]. In other words, tone of voice represents the speaker's thoughts, emotions, and attitude. Different tones convey different emotions, and the audience can also sense the host's thoughts and emotions from their tone of voice. In CGTN's "High-End Interview," host Zou Yun's tone changes constantly depending on the information provided by the interviewee. For example, when discussing China's new energy vehicles, rural revitalization, and the profound and extensive Chinese civilization, Zou Yun's tone is one of pride, excitement, and happiness; When discussing global threats, geopolitical turmoil, trade deficits, and other topics, Zou Yun's tone reflects deep thought, concern, and care; When discussing the construction of a community with a shared future for mankind, civilizational exchange and mutual learning, and win-win cooperation, Zou Yun's tone is one of equality and friendship. At the same time, Zou Yun's spoken language emphasizes stress and often rises in tone, combined with rich facial expressions, eye movements, and other nonverbal cues, making her expression extremely objective and communicative (Zhou, 2024) ^[5]. This sincere and enthusiastic approach to communication not only bridges the psychological gap with the audience but also reflects the image of a warm and hospitable major power.

4.4 Media literacy

The term "media literacy" can be traced back to the United Kingdom, emphasizing people's ability to correctly recognize, use, and critically evaluate media information. It encompasses multidimensional skills such as cognition, understanding, evaluation, and creation of media content. When this literacy extends to the dimension of professional media producers, the media literacy of hosts needs to focus on their deep involvement in content production and creation. The transformation of the media ecosystem in the era of omni-media has further reshaped the requirements for media literacy: on the one hand, the communication model has shifted from the one-way dissemination of television to two-way interaction on mobile devices, requiring hosts to master cross-platform content creation skills; on the other hand, the increased participation rights of audiences require hosts to strengthen interaction with audiences and enhance user stickiness.

For example, Wang Guan not only appears on television screens as a bilingual anchor for CGTN, but has also joined the ranks of content creators on short video platforms. On TikTok, he posts a variety of short videos with rich content. Some

videos provide concise interpretations of international current affairs, using his profound knowledge and keen insight to quickly convey key information in simple and professional terms, satisfying users' need for quick access to information. Other videos are about life insights, using a friendly and natural language style to enhance the audience's emotional resonance and narrow the psychological distance between him and his users. At the same time, he emphasizes audience participation rights, enhancing user engagement through diverse content and active interaction, vividly illustrating the multi-dimensional media literacy skills—including cognition, creativity, and interaction—that hosts should possess in the era of all-media.

5 Conclusions

In the process of exchange and integration among diverse civilizations, China's image is increasingly attracting attention, acceptance, and recognition from the international community. The path of cross-cultural communication is not smooth sailing. The “external shaping” of national image and changes in the media environment have brought many challenges to communication work. However, in the face of the current challenges in communication, the role of bilingual hosts has become increasingly clear and important. Bilingual hosts are the storytellers of China, bridging communication gaps with their bilingual skills and enabling the world to hear China's compelling narrative. They are steadfast interpreters of China's national stance, upholding China's position and conveying China's voice amidst the clash of diverse cultures. They are active advocates of civilizational exchange, fostering interaction and integration among different civilizations. They are effective practitioners of public diplomacy, leveraging their personal charm and professional expertise to enhance international understanding and recognition of China. In order to better fulfill the responsibilities of these roles, bilingual hosts should strengthen their political literacy, cultural literacy, professional literacy, and media literacy, presenting a balanced, objective, and multidimensional image of China to international audiences and promoting cultural exchange and dissemination.

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