

Cultural Translation and National Image Construction: A Study on the Role Functions and Communication Strategies of Chinese International Hosts

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ABSTRACT

To enhance China's voice on the international stage, it is imperative to "accelerate the development of Chinese discourse and narrative frameworks while comprehensively improving the effectiveness of international communication." The role of Chinese international anchors is crucial in this context. This paper examines the CGTN series produced by China Media Group. Analyzing from three crucial dimensions—cultural translation, communication strategies, and role missions—this study examines how international hosts shoulder the media responsibility of promoting mutual learning among civilizations and building a community with a shared future for mankind. They foster a positive atmosphere in international communication and guide constructive public discourse, and build a positive image of a major power that both stays true to its cultural roots and embraces a global vision, committed to providing public goods for the world.

KEYWORDS

International communication; China's international hosts; Media responsibility; Culture; International image

1 Introduction

As globalization accelerates, the landscape of international communication presents a complex interplay of political maneuvering and technological empowerment. Cultural outreach serves as a vital means to enhance a nation's cultural soft power and elevate its global influence. We must "uphold the position of Chinese culture, distill and showcase the spiritual identity and cultural essence of Chinese civilization, accelerate the development of Chinese discourse and narrative systems, tell China's stories well, disseminate China's voice effectively, and present a credible, likable, and respectable image of China." Therefore, cross-cultural communication must adhere to sound journalistic values. This paper analyzes the international communication capabilities of CGTN anchors, focusing on the role functions and communication strategies of Chinese international anchors. Researching cultural symbol transformation, personalized narratives, the shift in discourse from propaganda to dialogue, and the media responsibility borne by hosts in the era of globalization, learn from China's international broadcasters how they adapt to future media challenges, transition into new roles, embrace the mission of their era, and grow into outstanding media professionals who excel on the global stage.

2 Cultural translation: the practice of reconstructing meaning in cross-cultural communication

2.1 Symbolic conversion: the cross-contextual encoding capacity of cultural imagery

Cultural translation in the context of international communication involves profound symbolic transformation and semantic reconstruction. As a pivotal link in communication, hosts must possess the ability to transcend linguistic boundaries in decoding cultural imagery. This entails accurately identifying symbols imbued with the unique history, emotions, and values inherent in Chinese culture as the source culture. They must then creatively decode and recode these symbols, transforming them into new representational symbols that resonate within the cultural cognitive frameworks and emotional systems of international audiences—symbols that are understood, accepted, and even evoke shared emotional responses. The concept of high-context and low-context cultures proposed by American anthropologist Edward Hall provides a novel and effective analytical framework for cross-cultural communication studies. We should make good use of this theory to analyze cross-cultural communication phenomena and adopt communication strategies that are equal, open, and flexible ^[1]. Chinese culture is a quintessential high-context culture, where vast amounts of information are embedded within implicit, shared cultural backgrounds. Take "dumplings during the Spring Festival" as an example—their symbolic meaning extends beyond mere food, embodying complex emotional values like "family reunion" and "bidding farewell to the old and welcoming the new." Presenting this directly to an audience unfamiliar with the contextual culture would result in the loss of its deeper significance. The host's coding ability lies in not only showcasing the physical object of "dumplings" but also narratively imbuing it with the concepts of "family reunion" and "the taste of home," thereby achieving cross-contextual meaning transmission.

This is the strategic core for international presenters to bridge cultural divides and achieve effective communication: they must not only become linguistic experts deeply versed in both cultures, but also possess a semiotics mindset.

Through creative practice, transform cultural symbols of “the other” into coherent, tangible shared human narratives. By dissolving cognitive barriers and cultural divides through discourse, we build a bridge of meaning between China and the world.

2.2 Value resonance: evoking and connecting shared human emotions

In today's era of globalization, news reporting in the field of international communication has long transcended its role as a mere conduit for information transmission, evolving instead into a pivotal vehicle for the export and collision of cultural values^[2]. Hosts must anchor in universal human emotions to achieve cross-cultural resonance and connection, elevating their approach from technical execution to strategic vision—transcending cultural translation to evoke shared humanity. They should uncover those “universal human emotions” that transcend civilizations, races, and borders: such as the longing for home, the reverence for resilience, the yearning for reunion, and the hope for the future. These serve as the cornerstone for reconstructing meaning, transforming Chinese narratives into “human stories” that trigger the deepest resonance of values and forge effective emotional bonds. Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory reveals that humans share fundamental, cross-cultural needs such as safety, belonging, love, and respect. When a host's narrative resonates with these underlying needs, it can better connect with shared human emotions.

The role of an international host extends beyond mere symbolic translation. It requires the ability to warmly uncover the shared human emotions within stories, seamlessly weaving Chinese narratives into the global spectrum of shared values. By distilling the universal human values embedded within these narratives, they gain worldwide appeal. This represents the most profound influence communication efforts can exert in the process of building a community with a shared future for mankind.

2.3 Narrative innovation: personalized approaches to grand themes

In international communication, grand national themes often create a perceptual gap with individual audiences' daily lives due to their abstract and monumental nature. Narrative transmission theory posits that personalized narratives are the most effective means of “transporting” audiences into the worlds constructed by stories, enabling them to unconsciously absorb the perspectives and values embedded within the narrative. International hosts employ innovative storytelling techniques to craft personalized narratives, transforming grand national narratives into vivid human stories and emotional experiences. They dissect major themes through intimate perspectives and reflect the broader era through ordinary individuals. Reconstructing abstract political and policy symbols into “experiential symbols” grounded in human empathy guides international audiences to participate in interpreting and reshaping the meaning of Chinese narratives. Through emotional engagement, they come to understand and embrace the underlying Chinese values behind these stories, thereby achieving effective co-creation of meaning at the micro level. For instance, CGTN anchor Liu Xin used the warmth of a cup of tea to illustrate the spirit of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. A tea cup gifted by Taj, an Azerbaijani youth studying in China through the Belt and Road Initiative, paved the way for a heartwarming tea meeting with the President of Azerbaijan. This demonstrates how the smallest connections between individuals can build bridges for exchanges between nations.

This narrative innovation employs storytelling and personification techniques to break down China's grand narrative into countless “meaning units” that carry universal human emotions. It adheres to the principles of cross-cultural communication by delivering compelling stories and relatable characters, allowing international audiences to independently derive and reconstruct meaning—from personal narratives to national identity, from emotional resonance to shared values—ultimately maximizes and deepens communication impact. This approach enables China's grand narratives to achieve truly global, human-centered, and effective dissemination.

3 Communication strategy: pathways to enhancing the effectiveness of international communication

3.1 The transformation of discourse: from propaganda to dialogue

The fundamental approach to enhancing the effectiveness of international communication lies in establishing a more open, interactive, and audience-centered dialogue model. As practitioners at the forefront of communication, international hosts must spearhead the transformation from “propagandists” to “dialogue facilitators.” By fundamentally altering their communication style, they can dismantle the psychological defenses of audiences who perceive themselves as targets of propaganda. This shift builds cross-cultural trust and fosters a “communication community” grounded in equality and respect. Consequently, it significantly enhances the credibility, acceptance, and interactivity of communication, ultimately achieving a fundamental improvement in the effectiveness of cross-cultural communication. For instance, CGTN anchor Tian Wei exemplifies the conversational style. During her exclusive interview with WTO Deputy

Director-General Zhang Xiangchen, she asked how he viewed trade negotiations between the world's two largest economies and how to prepare for both the best and worst outcomes. This open, equal dialogue introduced why these negotiations matter globally.

The fundamental transformation in the discourse of international hosts is achieved through specific strategies such as employing exploratory phrasing, directly addressing audience concerns, and presenting the exploration process to establish a first-person perspective. These approaches effectively reduce communication friction while enhancing credibility and approachability. Once the cross-cultural trust built through the sincerity, respect, and humility conveyed by this communication style is established, the process transforms into an effective dialogue jointly participated in and accomplished by both communicators and recipients. Audiences not only hear China's voice but also become more willing to believe and understand the logic and values behind China's stories. This is precisely the path China must take to modernize its international communication capabilities, and it is also the most fundamental and effective strategic approach to enhancing the effectiveness of international communication.

3.2 Micro-macro integration: aligning personal narratives with national strategies

In cross-cultural communication, national strategies such as the Belt and Road Initiative, poverty alleviation, and ecological civilization often encounter cognitive barriers and emotional detachment among international audiences due to their macro-level, abstract, and political nature. Some scholars have proposed the interactive theory of "micro-macro narratives." Compared to traditional narrative techniques, this theory introduces two innovative variations: "typological permeation" and "ritualized memory."^[3] Therefore, international hosts should establish a new paradigm of cross-cultural communication that is credible, relatable, and accessible. Their pivotal role lies in serving as creative bridges between the micro and macro levels. By selecting representative individual stories and organically linking them to grand national strategies, they use the tangible experiences of personal destinies to provide the most compelling annotations for the legitimacy and effectiveness of grand narratives, through creative semantic connections, the narrative guides international audiences to focus on the more universally valued positive attributes within the strategy. This approach constructs a tangible narrative that combines national significance with human warmth, significantly enhancing the credibility, memorability, and emotional resonance of the communication. It also elevates the effectiveness of international outreach.

International presenters leverage micro-macro integration capabilities, adhering to the communication principle that "concrete trumps abstract." Through precise case selection and profound interpretation of meaning, they establish logical and emotional connections between macro-level strategies and micro-level individuals, thereby overcoming the inherent barriers to acceptance inherent in grand narratives. This strategy not only enhances the acceptability and persuasiveness of communication content but also transforms international communication from policy advocacy into contemporary documentation. It fundamentally optimizes communication effectiveness, presenting to the world a developing, tangible, and responsible image of China.

3.3 Credible construction: manifesting professional competence and empirical spirit

Amidst the complex dynamics of international discourse, the core competitiveness of hosts in China's narrative is shifting from "message delivery" to "credibility building," transitioning from a "he said" communication model to a rational paradigm of "he said, she said." As the frontline representatives of China's voice, hosts should embody a spirit of calmness, professionalism, and evidence-based reasoning to demonstrate the professional standards and commitment to truth aligned with global top-tier journalism. By following the cognitive path of "evidence-logic-conclusion," they should establish a credible space, guiding audiences to make judgments based on facts and logic. This approach effectively dismantles biases and lays a solid foundation for the validity of communication. For instance, CGTN new media reporter Wang Tao took viewers on a journey to Sayram Lake, inviting them to "see for themselves." Through interviews with several foreign friends sharing their impressions, he revealed the authentic Xinjiang—with its azure waters and vibrant grasslands. This evidence-based credibility-building approach represents not only an upgrade in communication strategy but also a crucial pathway for China's participation in reshaping the global knowledge system.

The transformation currently underway in China's narrative lies precisely in the shift from emotional value persuasion to rational factual demonstration, and from macro policy advocacy to micro evidence presentation—a paradigm shift in communication leadership. Moreover, through strategies such as on-site firsthand evidence, rigorous data interpretation, and balanced multi-source citations, the narrative of China is constructed upon a solid foundation of facts. At the same time, it adheres to the principle of balanced reporting by granting ample narrative space to "others," thereby constructing an open, transparent, and diverse narrative landscape. Such communication also embodies the composed, objective, and confident demeanor befitting a major power.

4 Role mission: embracing media responsibility in the globalized era

4.1 Identity synergy: the unity of professional journalist and cultural ambassador

In the complex global discourse landscape of the globalization era, emerging concepts such as “cultural soft power” emphasize the reconstruction of discourse and the shaping of values. This transcends the limitations of the traditional tripartite structure, shifting focus instead to how transnational cultures forge consensus and guide cultural identity within complex global economic systems, thereby reshaping international political and cultural orders^[4]. Therefore, amplifying China's voice and asserting its right to speak represent the deeper mission of international anchors. They must adhere to the core principles of objectivity, fairness, and truth-seeking that define professional journalists. Building on earned international trust, they should become cultural ambassadors who convey China's perspective and foster mutual learning among civilizations. This dual identity forms a unified entity of complementary “bridge communicators,” internalizing media professionalism as a credible foundation for cultural transmission while elevating cultural exchange into a global public good. It drives constructive cross-cultural dialogue, fulfills profound media responsibilities in the era of globalization, and serves the grand vision of building a community with a shared future for mankind. For example, CGTN anchor Wang Guan mentioned in “Speaking to the World” the importance of helping the world understand China. Quoting Confucius's saying, “A gentleman seeks harmony without uniformity,” she proposed that young people worldwide embrace one another, build bridges of friendship, and foster cross-cultural understanding.

A nation's appeal stems from its culture and values. As the foremost cultural touchpoints, hosts embody the tangible manifestation of a nation's soft power through their words and actions. By upholding cultural values with professionalism, enriching news content through cultural perspectives, and fostering global dialogue with a transcendent approach, we build bridges of understanding across the chasms of division. Ultimately achieving profound value synergy constitutes the soft power that subtly shapes a nation's image.

4.2 Ethical balance: accuracy of facts and national position

In the global communication arena, international anchors face the core challenge of upholding the supreme pursuit of factual accuracy demanded by journalistic professionalism while remaining true to the national stance required of Chinese media professionals. This necessitates constructing a narrative framework centered on facts and anchored by position, thereby earning credibility and discourse power within the complex international public opinion landscape. The concept of public diplomacy indicates that modern diplomacy is no longer a one-sided affair between governments, but rather a dialogue directed at the public of various nations. Unlike government diplomacy, it seeks to influence international public opinion and shape a nation's image through international communication. Therefore, international communication serves as the core vehicle of public diplomacy and is a crucial factor determining its success or failure. Hosts are key practitioners of public diplomacy, directly engaging with citizens of other nations to influence the international public opinion landscape by providing information and fostering mutual understanding. For instance, aligning China's national stance and practices with globally recognized challenges or universal values—such as poverty alleviation, climate change, and peaceful development—can position China as a global public good that addresses shared human aspirations.

The role of China International's anchors is to provide responsible and constructive interpretation by delivering in-depth facts, procedural facts, and global facts. For the host, adhering to the utmost factual accuracy means remaining faithful to a responsible national stance as the interpretive framework for constructing the most effective dissemination of facts. The ultimate aim is to present to the world an image of China that is both bold in confronting problems and committed to solving them, thereby earning solid moral authority and discourse power in the era of globalization.

4.3 Horizon convergence: where local consciousness meets the global landscape

In an era marked by the coexistence of globalization and localization, China's international hosts must be both deeply rooted in Chinese soil, embodying a distinct local consciousness, and possess a global perspective that addresses the shared destiny of humanity. And simultaneously achieve the creative convergence and integration of these two perspectives—contributing to global problem-solving through deep local practice, while enriching local narratives with a broad global outlook. Thus pioneering a new paradigm in international communication that employs universally accessible narrative grammar to tell Chinese stories with distinct local characteristics. At the same time, the concept of “global-localization” in communication studies explores how the global and the local complement and interact with each other to forge a positive relationship^[5]. The interaction between global and local dimensions is emphasized. Successful global communication is not merely a one-way approach of “global perspective, local action,” but rather requires presenters to innovate their narratives and expressions by applying the principle of “local wisdom, global sharing” in reverse. When CGTN anchor Wang Guan interviewed the UN Special Adviser on Climate Change, she employed a vision-

integrated questioning approach to articulate how China's solutions are indispensable to the global green transition.

International hosts are emerging as pivotal nodes on the global-local continuum. Through the creative convergence of local consciousness and international perspectives, they not only successfully tell China's stories but also participate in constructing a new narrative of globalization. This narrative respects cultural diversity and acknowledges the multiple paths toward modernity, elevating Chinese hosts from conveyors of national discourse to facilitators of civilizational dialogue. It provides an indispensable mediating foundation for building a community with a shared future for mankind. It also presents to the world the image of a major power that remains true to its cultural roots, embraces the world with a global vision, and is committed to providing public goods for the global community.

5 Conclusions

China needs to better understand the world, and the world needs to better understand China. The evolution of the role and competency development of China's international hosts represents a profound symbolic cross-cultural practice. Centered on cultural translation and aimed at enhancing communication effectiveness, it achieves the integration of local experiences with global issues through narrative innovation that combines micro and macro perspectives. This successfully transforms grand Chinese narratives into human stories that are perceptible, comprehensible, and resonant. This is not only a demonstration of communication capabilities but also a vivid practice of civilizational exchange and mutual learning. It signifies China's leap from instrumental rationality to value-driven rationality in international communication, offering Chinese wisdom and solutions for building a more inclusive and interactive global communication order. In the future, China's international hosts will continue to contribute indispensable media wisdom and communication strength to building a community with a shared future for mankind through their outstanding professional practices in international communication.

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