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Article

The English Translation of *The Governance of China V* from the Perspective of Skopos Theory

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Abstract: With China's growing participation in global governance, the English translation of official political discourse has become increasingly important for international communication and cross-cultural understanding. *The Governance of China V* serves as a key publication for presenting China's governance philosophy, strategic development goals, and policy orientations to a global audience. Consequently, ensuring the accuracy and effectiveness of its translation is paramount for fostering accurate international perceptions. Based on Skopos Theory, this paper analyzes the English translation of a selected passage which focuses on the construction of a financial culture with Chinese characteristics. Through a comprehensive comparative analysis of the source text and the target text, the study systematically examines how specific translation choices and strategies are guided by the three foundational rules of Skopos Theory: the skopos rule, the coherence rule, and the fidelity rule. The analysis further confirms the hierarchical relationship among these three rules, illustrating how the overarching purpose of the translation dictates the linguistic and cultural adaptations required in the target text. By evaluating these strategic adaptations, the research demonstrates the robust applicability of Skopos Theory to the translation of contemporary Chinese political discourse. Ultimately, this study provides valuable insights into the mechanisms of external publicity translation, offering practical implications for translators working with highly sensitive and culturally specific political texts, and contributing to the broader academic discourse on political translation and international communication strategies.

Keywords: political discourse; translation strategies; Skopos theory; publicity translation

1. Introduction

With the continuous expansion of China's international engagement, the translation of official political discourse has become an important channel for presenting China's governance philosophy to the global audience. As the principal founder of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era, the leadership has articulated comprehensive theories and practices regarding China's governance, which have gained extensive attention both domestically and internationally.

Against this backdrop, *The Governance of China* was published to systematically introduce China's development path, logic, and policy orientation to the international community. *The Governance of China V*, published in 2025, comprises 91 works, including reports, speeches, talks, interviews, letters, and instructions, dating from May 27, 2022, to December 20, 2024. These works are organized into 18 thematic sections, with several pieces being published officially for the first time, systematically conveying China's latest political values, development goals, and governing principles.

This paper examines an excerpt from T*he Governance of China V* and its English translation. The selected passage discusses the development of a financial culture with Chinese characteristics, emphasizing key values such as integrity, ethical profit-making, and innovation-driven. Drawing on Skopos Theory, this paper explores how translation strategies are guided by the intended purpose of external publicity translation, and how

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the English version seeks to ensure clarity, credibility, and accessibility for international readers.

2. Theoretical Framework

This chapter outlines the development of Skopos Theory and its position within the functionalist translation theory, then introduces its three core rules and their inner link: the skopos rule, the coherence rule, and the fidelity rule.

2.1. The Development of Skopos Theory

Skopos Theory is a mainstream school of German functional translation theory, which has undergone four stages of development. It posits that the translation action is primarily determined by the purpose it is intended to serve in the target context.

The origins of functionalist translation can be traced back to Katharina Reiss. She initially suggested that a translation project is a process of seeking a balance between the source language and the target language, with the text function included in translation criticism. The function and purpose of the translation should be considered first when evaluating the translation [1].

Building upon these ideas, Reiss's student, Hans J. Vermeer, further developed the framework. Vermeer formally introduced Skopos Theory and proposed three rules: the skopos rule, the coherence rule, and the fidelity rule. He argued that the dominant factor in a translation is its purpose, with intratextual coherence being more important than intertextual coherence [2]. Following Vermeer's Skopos Theory, Holz-Mänttäri viewed translation as a purpose-driven communicative activity [3]. Nord later summarized two translation strategies: documentary translation and instrumental translation, and introduced the principle of function plus loyalty, further enriching the structure of Skopos Theory [4].

2.2. Three Core Rules of Skopos Theory

According to Vermeer, Skopos Theory is governed by three fundamental rules: the skopos rule, the coherence rule, and the fidelity rule, with the skopos rule being the most essential.

The skopos rule dictates that the intended purpose of the translation determines the entire process and the methods employed. Generally, the skopos in the skopos rule refers to the communicative purpose. A text must be translated in a way that enables it to function effectively in its intended context.

The coherence rule means that the translation must meet the criteria of intratextual coherence, ensuring that the translation is readable and acceptable. The translation needs to produce meaning in the cultural environment of the target language and be understood by the target language readers. The target text must be internally coherent so that readers can comprehend it, and it must be meaningful within the context in which it is used.

The fidelity rule, also referred to as intertextual coherence, pertains to the fidelity of the target language text to the original text. Unlike the traditional notion of faithfulness to the original text, this rule requires the target text to maintain a necessary degree of coherence with the source text, with the extent determined by the translation's purpose.

The above three rules are intrinsically linked. Specifically, the fidelity rule must yield to the coherence rule, while both the coherence rule and the fidelity rule are subordinate to the skopos rule. For example, if the translation's purpose is to highlight a specific source-language grammatical structure, the translator may need to compromise the coherence of the target text to achieve this goal. When conflicts arise between fidelity and coherence, the translator generally prioritizes coherence to ensure the text is functional for the target audience.

3. Literature Review

This chapter reviews major applications of Skopos Theory across various translation contexts, examines research on political and external publicity translation, and

summarizes existing studies on the series of *The Governance of China*. Based on this review, a research gap is identified, forming the foundation for the study.

3.1. Studies on the Skopos Theory

Skopos Theory has been widely adopted in the translation of various text types, particularly among those with explicit communicative purposes. In literary studies, Skopos Theory helps explain the personal style of translators. A comparison of two famous English versions of the Chinese classic Hongloumeng revealed that differences in word choices were driven by each translator's purpose and the surrounding environment of the time [5]. The theory is also essential in theatrical translation, where a play must be adapted for a new audience. A study on the South African version of Arthur Miller's *All My Sons* argued that the purpose of the translation determines whether a translator should use domestication or foreignization [6].

In the field of audiovisual translation, research emphasizes the necessity of non-literal adaptation. One investigation into non-literal translation strategies in film titles highlighted that cognitive operations are aimed at achieving functional adequacy [7]. Similarly, another study adapted Skopos Theory for audio description in foreign films, proposing that the choices made by translators regarding content and form should be guided by a hierarchy of rules that prioritize the needs and cultural background of the target audience [8].

Skopos Theory is also used as a tool for intercultural and interdisciplinary interaction. Some researchers argue against a narrow technical focus on word-for-word equivalence in international business, suggesting that translators must make decisions based on specific social contexts and the needs of the target audience [9]. Another study applied Skopos Theory to examine how ideas move between accounting and human resource management. The findings suggest that the same translation rules can lead to different results depending on the translator's goals and the professional environment [10].

3.2. Studies on External Publicity Translation

External publicity translation is a specialized form of translation practice conducted in the context of globalization, aiming to facilitate the international community's understanding of a nation. Foreign audiences, including overseas readers and foreigners residing within the nation, constitute the target recipients [11]. From a broad perspective, external publicity translation encompasses the translation of all materials intended for international communication. However, in a narrower sense, it primarily refers to the translation of official political texts, such as government work reports, policy documents, and speeches. This paper adopts the narrower definition, focusing on the English translation of Chinese political texts of *The Governance of China V*.

In recent years, research on external publicity translation of political texts has expanded significantly, reflecting its growing importance in translation studies [12-18]. Studies have explored various aspects of this field, such as the translation of legal terms with unique national characteristics, emphasizing principles like accuracy and readability to enhance understanding of the legal system and promote cultural exchange. Other research has examined political news translation, highlighting the need for translators to balance professional techniques with cultural awareness to effectively convey national development to a global audience. Additionally, the translation of government work reports has been analyzed for its role in serving strategic objectives, such as narrating the nation's story and enhancing its international image. Scholars have proposed frameworks that consider strategies like explicitation and amplification, which are determined by political communication goals and the expectations of the readership.

3.3. Identification of the Research Gap

Although Skopos Theory is frequently mentioned in discussions of translations, detailed analyses of external publicity translation remain relatively limited, particularly concerning certain political texts, leaving a clear research gap.

To address this gap, this study adopts the three rules of Skopos Theory as its theoretical framework to analyze a selected excerpt from a recent publication. The aim is to contribute to a deeper understanding of political text translation and to enrich existing research on external publicity translation from a Skopos Theory perspective.

4. Theory and Research Design

This chapter clarifies the overall translation purposes of *The Governance of China V* within the context of China's external political communication. It then analyzes the specific objectives of the selected passage from the fourth chapter.

4.1. Translation Purposes of The Governance of China V

According to Skopos Theory, the purpose of translation is determined collaboratively by the commissioner and the translator, taking into account the characteristics of the source text and the needs of the target audience.

For the English version of *The Governance of China V*, the commissioner is represented by the Chinese government, the translators are a professional team organized by Foreign Languages Press, and the target audience comprises readers whose native language is not Chinese and who may have limited familiarity with China's political and cultural context.

From the perspective of the target audience, the English version serves primarily as an authoritative reference for understanding China's governance philosophy and policy orientation. Foreign readers are likely to approach the translated text pragmatically, expecting it to be informative, clear, and internally consistent, while providing stable meanings for key political and institutional concepts. Consequently, the overarching translation goal is to present China's governance philosophy in a way that is both ideologically faithful and functionally effective for international readers, balancing accuracy with accessibility, encapsulated in the principle of "translating this monumental work well to tell China’s stories well."

4.2. Translation Purposes of the Selected Text

Different chapters and passages may serve specific purposes. This paper's research material is a section within the fourth chapter titled "Build China into a Financial Powerhouse." The text is based on an important speech delivered during a study session on high-quality development of the financial sector on January 16, 2024, attended by principal officials at the provincial and ministerial levels. The selected passage focuses on the construction of a financial culture with Chinese characteristics, emphasizing key values such as integrity, ethical profit-making, and innovation-driven development.

For foreign readers, the primary purpose of reading this passage is to understand China's financial governance logic and value orientation, particularly how moral principles and institutional discipline are integrated into economic development. Consequently, the main translation goal is to ensure that these ideas are conveyed in clear English, enabling readers to grasp China's financial concepts effectively.

This section also contains many traditional Chinese ethical expressions, cultural references, and colloquial language. Striving for authenticity in translation to preserve its lively and spirited style is of great importance. Furthermore, as an official political text, the translation must maintain ideological accuracy and authority, ensuring consistency in stance and evaluation.

In light of these purposes, this study applies the three core rules of Skopos Theory: the skopos rule, the coherence rule, and the fidelity rule as its analytical framework.

5. Data Analysis

This chapter conducts a detailed case analysis using representative examples from selected excerpts based on the skopos rule, the coherence rule, and the fidelity rule. It examines how translation strategies are applied to achieve specific objectives within the framework of China's external publicity communication.

5.1. Analysis from the Perspective of the Skopos Rule

As the highest-ranking principle in Skopos Theory, the skopos rule requires that translation choices be primarily guided by the communicative purpose of the target text. In this section, two examples are analyzed to illustrate how the skopos determines concrete translation strategies.

Example 1

Source text:推动金融高质量发展、建设金融强国，要坚持法治和德治相结合，大力弘扬中华优秀传统文化，积极培育中国特色金融文化(To promote high-quality financial development and build a strong financial country, it is necessary to adhere to the combination of the rule of law and moral governance, vigorously carry forward China's fine traditional culture, and actively cultivate a financial culture with Chinese characteristics.)

Target text: To promote high-quality development in the financial sector and build China into a financial powerhouse, we should adhere to both the rule of law and the rule of virtue, carry forward the best of traditional Chinese culture, and foster a financial culture with Chinese characteristics.

This sentence functions as a policy statement, summarizing the fundamental principles of China's financial development. In the source text, the subject is omitted, and there is loose coordination of multiple phrases describing actions, which is a common feature of Chinese political discourse. However, such a feature may confuse English readers, particularly in external publicity contexts where the policy agent and objectives need to be explicit.

At the syntactic level, the English translation adopts a strategy of restructuring. By using the infinitive phrase "To promote...and build China into..." followed by the main clause "we should...", the translation establishes a clear relationship, clarifying the policy goals and corresponding measures. The explicit addition of "China" as the object and "we" as the subject helps clearly identify the agent and target of China's policy. This shift reflects English readers' preference for explicit agency and deductive organization, which directly serves the purpose of clarity and accessibility in external publicity translation.

Example 2

Source text:金融行业以信用为基础，更要坚持契约精神，恪守市场规则和职业操守。(The financial industry is based on credit, and must uphold the spirit of contract more and strictly abide by market rules and professional ethics.)

Target text: The financial sector is underpinned by credibility. Its word must be its bond, and it must follow market rules and observe professional ethics.

This statement not only conveys financial norms but also serves a persuasive and normative function. Its purpose is to convince the audience that the development of the financial sector should be rooted in individual credibility, commitment, and professional discipline, rather than being solely driven by expansion or profit. This approach aims to gain audience support and inspire action to uphold virtuous principles.

To achieve this goal, the translator avoids a literal translation of "QiYueJingShen" as "contract spirit" and instead uses the idiomatic expression "its word must be its bond." This choice directly supports the communicative goal of persuasion. A literal translation such as "contract spirit" functions primarily as a technical or academic term in English, lacking the ethical and persuasive impact necessary to resonate with the target audience. In contrast, the phrase "its word must be its bond" is deeply rooted in English culture and conveys trust, integrity, and moral responsibility. This enables the target text to effectively deliver the intended ethical appeal in a way that is both intelligible and convincing to English readers, fulfilling its persuasive purpose. Additionally, "KeShouShiChangGuiZeHeZhiYeCaoShou" is translated as "follow market rules and observe professional ethics," presenting ethical compliance as widely accepted norms to enhance the persuasive impact of the text, rather than using rigid commands such as "strictly abide," which might reduce audience acceptance.

5.2. Analysis from the Perspective of the Coherence Rule

The rule of coherence refers to the readability and acceptability of the translation, ensuring that it can be understood by target language readers within their cultural context without requiring knowledge of the source culture. This example demonstrates how coherence is achieved through effective translation strategies.

Example 3:

Source text: 坚持欠债还钱，珍惜信誉，不当老赖。(Adhere to the principle that debts must be repaid, cherish credibility, and do not become a deadbeat.)

Target text: An honored debt adds to credibility; an unpaid debt diminishes it.

The translation achieves acceptability by re-contextualizing a moral slogan into a universal truth in business. The Chinese source text is a slogan-like moral appeal and relies heavily on shared social knowledge, especially the term "LaoLai," which refers to someone who has the ability to repay a debt but deliberately refuses to do so. It is a slang term unique to China and loaded with cultural significance. While its moral implication is immediately clear to Chinese readers, international readers may find it obscure or require additional explanation. A direct translation would violate the coherence rule, as readers might need to consult external sources or footnotes to grasp its meaning. To avoid this, the translator removes the culture-bound term and reconstructs the message, shifting the focus from a person's moral identity to the relationship between unpaid debt and credibility with a cause-effect relationship grounded in globally shared legal and business logic. This approach allows the message to be understood without requiring knowledge of the Chinese social credit context.

Additionally, verbs such as "JianChi" and "ZhenXi" carry strong instructive tones. In Chinese, such verbs are easily accepted. However, if such verbs are translated literally into English, problems of coherence may arise. Take "ZhenXi" as an example; it can mean "to love something or someone very much and want to protect them" or "to keep an idea, hope, or pleasant feeling in your mind for a long time." In a financial context, expressions like "cherish credibility" may sound vague or illogical to English readers, who may find it difficult to understand without knowledge of China's credit system. The omission of these verbs removes potential semantic confusion and helps the target text remain conceptually clear. Moreover, the English translation presents a paired structure "...adds to...diminishes...," framing credibility as an outcome that can increase or decrease. This transformation turns an abstract moral appeal into a clear evaluative statement, making the logic immediately accessible.

5.3. Analysis from the Perspective of the Fidelity Rule

The fidelity rule requires the target text to maintain a consistent relationship with the source text in terms of core meaning, value orientation, and evaluative stance. The following example illustrates how fidelity is achieved in the translation.

Example 4:

Source text: 二要以义取利，不唯利是图。中华优秀传统文化强调“先义而后利者荣，先利而后义者辱”，见利忘义一向为君子所不齿。(Secondly, one should seek benefits based on righteousness, rather than solely pursuing profits. The fine traditional culture of China emphasizes that "those who put righteousness first and profit second are honored; those who put profit first and righteousness second are disgraced." and forgetting righteousness when seeing profit has always been something despised by gentlemen.)

Target text: Second, the financial sector should pursue profit through ethical means, rather than place profit above all else. Traditional Chinese culture holds that "honor belongs to those who prioritize ethics over profit, while disgrace befalls those who place profit above ethics." Forsaking good for the sake of gold has always been held in disdain by people of virtue.

Both the source text and the target text focus on the same core meaning: profit-seeking must be guided by moral considerations. In the source text, this principle is expressed through the opposition between "Yi" (moral principles and ethical

responsibility) and "Li" (material benefit or profit), which come from traditional Chinese ethical thoughts and constitute a long-standing moral debate. In the target text, this core meaning is preserved by re-contextualization, rendering "Yi" as "ethics" or "good" and "Li" as "profit" or "gold," effectively transforming them into universally recognizable principles of business ethics.

The sentence "YaoYiYiQuLi, BuWeiLiShiTu" associates normative value orientation. The target text retains this orientation by stating ethics is the governing principle of profit-making, as seen in expressions "...should pursue profit through ethical means, rather than place profit above all else." The translation ensures the original underlying moral stance remains unchanged, reproducing it in a form accessible for the audience and compatible with international ethical discourse.

With regard to evaluative stance, the sentence "XianYiErHouLiZheRong, XianLiErHouYiZheRu" associates righteousness-first behavior with honor and profit-first behavior with disgrace. The English translation preserves this structure through a parallel positive-negative contrast: "honor belongs to those who prioritize ethics over profit, while disgrace befalls those who place profit above ethics." By reproducing this evaluative contrast structure, the translation accurately conveys the source text's moral evaluative stance and framework. Additionally, the sentence "JianLiWangYiYiXiangWeiJunZiSuoBuChi" condemns profit-first behavior into three elements as follows. The phrase "JianLiWangYi" defines a behavior in which profit is pursued at the expense of moral principles, while "JunZi" represents a moral ideal and authoritative evaluator in traditional Chinese ethics. The expression "BuChi" does not merely indicate disagreement but signals the intensity of moral contempt. In the translation, this moral evaluation is preserved through the rendering "Forsaking good for the sake of gold has always been held in disdain by people of virtue." The opposition between "good" and "gold" reconstructs the ethical conflict between "Yi" and "Li," while "held in disdain" explicitly conveys the same moral disapproval as the original. Moreover, translating "JunZi" as "people of virtue" rather than "gentleman" retains its function as a moral authority, as "gentleman" only carries the nature of people with good courtesy. In this way, the translation maintains fidelity in moral evaluation by preserving who judges, what is judged, and how strongly it is condemned.

5.4. The Hierarchical Operation of the Three Rules in Practice

The intrinsic relationship among the skopos rule, the coherence rule, and the fidelity rule can be illustrated through the following example.

Example 5:

Source text: 国际上一些金融机构能够成为百年老店，基业长青，最重要的秘诀是稳健审慎。(Some international financial institutions have been able to become century-old enterprises and maintain evergreen foundations, and the most important secret is being steady and prudent.)

Target text: Some of the world's most successful financial institutions have thrived to this day because they operate with prudence.

"BaiNianLaoDian" refers to enterprises with a long business history built on good credibility and craftsmanship, while "JiYeChangQing" refers to sustainable and long-lasting value creation. The target audience would find it difficult to understand the message without relying on knowledge of Chinese cultural metaphors. In the translation, the culturally specific metaphors are not retained. This indicates that formal fidelity is deliberately sacrificed, giving priority to the coherence rule. To ensure acceptability and readability, the metaphorical expressions are replaced with the widely used term "successful financial institutions have thrived to this day." This reconstruction allows the target audience to understand the message without relying on knowledge of Chinese culture.

However, the decision to prioritize coherence is in turn governed by the skopos rule. The communicative purpose of this text is not to introduce Chinese metaphorical expressions but to convey a normative message that prudence is the key to sustainable

financial development. Thus, financial institutions are advised to operate with prudence. If the translation preserves metaphorical fidelity at the expense of clarity, it would undermine this purpose, as the English audience might not understand the relationship between sustainable financial development and prudence.

6. Conclusion

This case study has applied Skopos Theory to analyze the English translation of a selected excerpt from *The Governance of China V*. The analysis confirms the hierarchical relationship among the three rules: coherence is prioritized over fidelity when necessary, and both are subordinate to the skopos. The translator consistently prioritizes functional adequacy over formal equivalence, as seen in the reframing of culturally specific terms and the restructuring of syntax to align with English readers' expectations.

Due to the limited scope of this study, these findings should be interpreted as preliminary. Further research is needed to determine whether the observed patterns are representative of the entire volume. Despite this limitation, the study offers practical insights for translators of political discourse and contributes to the broader academic discussion on external publicity translation from a functionalist perspective.

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