# A Study of National Image Reconstruction in English Translation of Soft News from the Perspective of Framing Narratives: A Case Study of *China Daily*

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**Abstract:** At present, strengthening China's international communication capabilities and enhancing China's global influence have become important tasks. This study selects 60 pieces of soft news from *China Daily* from March 2023 to February 2024 as research objects and explores China's national image from the source texts. Then, based on Mona Baker's narrative theory, it analyzes the translation strategies to reconstruct the image of China, further revealing the regular characteristics of their application. Through translation, the reconstructed national image of China becomes more positive and more acceptable to foreign readers, effectively promoting the dissemination of Chinese stories in the international community. It is significant for promoting international understanding and cooperation, as well as effectively utilizing translation as a tool to enhance China's national image.

**Keywords:** *China Daily*; National image; Framing narratives; Soft news translation

## 1. Introduction

With the rapid development and enhancement of China's international status, China is rapidly moving to the center of the world stage. The challenge is conveying an image of China to the world from both traditional and modern perspectives, through a complete, systematic, and creative approach to communication that goes beyond mere propaganda. Currently, "China's story" has gone beyond its borders and into the world, but there is still much to explore in terms of "how to tell it well."

*China Daily* is an English-language daily newspaper published in China. It is one of the country's most widely read English-language newspapers and has catered to international audiences, including foreign diplomats and tourists, as well as English-speaking Chinese readers [1].

Based on Mona Baker's framing narratives, this study analyzes four translation methods in the context of

international communication to find the role that soft news translation plays in reconstructing China's national image.

## 2. Literature review

The translation of soft news, characterized by its focus on attractive stories, has garnered attention in the field of translation studies. Functional translation theory is one of frequently used ones in domestic studies. Both Wang [2] and Cao [3] applied the Skopos Theory, which prioritizes the intended function or impact of the translated texts on the target audiences. Besides, from the perspective of eco-translatology, Teng and Hu [4] uncovered that news translators intentionally make adaptive choices with multiple dimensions, including language and cultural communication in the translational eco-environment. From the communicative perspective, Huang [5] analyzed the translation strategy of soft news and argued that the translation process can also be regarded as a special process of information transmission, and that localization and foreignization can be applied in this process. In addition, there are also other translation theories in the research of soft news translation, such as text typology [6] and relevance theory [7].

The study of national image, as a multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary field, has drawn interest from scholars across various disciplines including international relations, communication studies, sociology, and cultural studies. Most of the previous studies are from foreign studies. Kunczik [8] and Manheim and Albritton [9] have been instrumental in defining the national image as a complex construct that encompasses the general perceptions and stereotypes held by one nation's people about another. Besides, attention should also be paid to the application of soft power theory by Nye [10], who argued that a positive national image can enhance a country's soft power, the ability to influence others through attraction and persuasion rather than coercion. Domestic studies also emerge to enhance China's international influence. Sun [11] concluded the functions of the national image such as political function, diplomatic function, and commercial function. From the perspective of mass communication, Liu [12] and Cheng [13] analyzed conditions, theories, and strategies of national image construction. Also, from the perspective of translation, Lu [14] related the Chinese-English translation of China's publicity materials to national image construction. Furthermore, there are also studies centering on cultural symbols [15] and intercultural communication [16], which are of great referential value. Nevertheless, previous studies do not pay attention to the pivotal role of individual narratives in national image reconstruction, which is a significant research topic in this field. Based on all the studies mentioned above, this study focuses on China's national image reconstruction from the perspective of soft news translation, which is a novel perspective in national image studies.

## 3. Results and discussion
### 3.1. China's national image in source texts

The selected texts predominantly shape a positive image of China, showcasing various aspects of contemporary Chinese society. Especially, the chosen articles frequently touch upon topics of Chinese society that are connected to China's modern development as well as Chinese traditional culture, illustrating the intertwined nature of modernity and tradition in Chinese society.

### 3.2. Translation strategies and China's national image in target texts

Narratives are not chronologies, not an undifferentiated list of happenings: they are stories that are temporally

and causally constituted in such a way as to allow us to make moral decisions and act in the real world [17]. Mona Baker's narrative theory suggests that the main strategies are employed by translators intentionally or unintentionally in constructing the source texts. News translation is defined as the method of transforming and editing news written in the source language into news expressed in the target language through the means of translation and editing [18]. Therefore, news translation, especially soft news translation, often has changes from the original text, and the purpose of the translators deserves attention.

Besides, as Baker mentioned, translation can serve a certain political purpose [19]. In the translation of social news with less political color, the translators' role is primarily to present to international audiences the anecdotes and happenings from different cultures and social backgrounds, to broaden their horizons, and to enrich their lives [20]. The reconstructed national image through soft news translation can stimulate foreign readers' curiosity about China. Additionally, they can get a better understanding of modern Chinese society from the translated news rather than just outdated stereotypes. Consequently, the translated soft news contributes to China's national image reconstruction, which plays a pivotal role in China's international communication capability.

### 3.2.1. Temporal and spatial framing

In the selected materials, the translators consciously or unconsciously adopt this strategy to achieve a certain effect. The translators change the narrative order to better adapt to the thought patterns of foreign readers. This strategy is commonly employed in the lead-in parts of selected pieces to tell foreign readers the outline of the event in their thinking mode, and on some other special occasions related to cultural differences, to provide foreign readers with familiar backgrounds.

Example 1:

近日，一外卖小哥发现一女子三单外卖都是酒，察觉其有轻生行为报警救下该女子。他这一见义勇为行为受到了表彰奖励。(2023 年 3 月 17 日，《中国日报》)

A delivery man in Hangzhou, Zhejiang Province, has been credited for his heroic actions after he saved a young woman from attempting suicide last week (March 17, 2023, *China Daily*).

In the above example, the target text puts the result first, then the cause, because this aligns more closely with the logic of English composition, which typically places the most important event at the beginning. In this way, such translation can be more acceptable to foreign audiences. Furthermore, the translator places the image of valor and righteousness at the forefront, further highlighting the brave and righteous demeanor of Chinese youth.

### 3.2.2. Selective appropriation of textual material

In the collected texts, the strategy of selective appropriation of textual material is employed most frequently. Almost every piece of soft news has used this strategy to rewrite the story. Omission and addition are the most common methods.

Example 2:

自 3 月 4 日以来，淄博火车站的到达人数创下纪录，3 月 4 日更是达到 27065 人，创近 3 年以来最高纪录。(2023 年 3 月 18 日，《中国日报》)

Zibo, a city with 4.5 million people, has had record numbers of arrivals at its train station since March 4. A total of 27,065 visitors arrived on Saturday, setting a record for daily passengers arriving at the railway station in the past three years (March 18, 2023, *China Daily*).

Example 2 adds "Zibo, a city with 4.5 million people" to illustrate the city's population size and compares

the number with that of visitors to achieve a better explanatory effect: based on understanding the population size of Zibo, target readers can better appreciate the large number of tourists. Moreover, the target reader can better understand the popularity of Zibo barbecue, which also highlights the improvement in Chinese people's consumption level: More people are choosing consumption for enjoyment, such as tourism and tasting gourmet food, rather than just consumption for survival.

### 3.2.3. Framing by labeling

Labeling here denotes "any discursive process that involves using a lexical item, term or phrase to identify a person, place, group, event or any other key elements in a narrative" [19]. The proper translation of labeling is pivotal in international communication because it symbolizes Chinese society and culture. This strategy can be found in pieces of news with Chinese buzzwords. There are mainly three methods applied to target texts: explanatory translation, transliteration, and equivalent expressions in English.

Explanatory translation is adopted for image reconstruction, especially in terms of some expressions with Chinese characteristics.

Example 3:

近日，广东财经大学广州校区图书馆设置的"发呆区"意外走红，冲上了微博热搜。不少同学在此学习备考、休息放空，还有广财别的校区的同学专门跑来"打卡"。(2023 年 3 月 27 日，《中国日报》)

The "relaxing and inspiration area" set up in a library at the Guangdong University of Finance & Economics has unexpectedly become a hit online (March 27, 2023, *China Daily*).

In example 8, "发呆区" is translated as "relaxing and inspiration area," which has a more positive effect in terms of image reconstruction. In Chinese, "发呆" is usually regarded as a waste of time or a lack of focus, giving it a negative connotation, but also a way to relax and temporarily escape from stress. In the source text, "发呆区" is the keyword, so it is not appropriate to omit it. Thus, the translator uses a "relaxing and inspiration area" to explain the actual meaning and avoid controversy. Accordingly, such a label is beneficial for reconstructing a more positive image of China.

### 3.2.4. Repositioning of participants

In the selected texts, the translator employs various methods to reach the effect of repositioning of participants including emphasizing the third person in the translation to underscore the objectivity of the news, changing the tense, and so on. This strategy is used less frequently than the previous three ones, and it can usually be found in personal conversion and tense conversion between the source texts and target texts.

Example 4:

这暖心的一幕也让不少网友大呼破防，为温暖的人点赞！(2023 年 4 月 1 日，《中国日报》)

A lot of netizens were touched by the story, and said it showed the care and support between people in Chinese society (April 1, 2023, *China Daily*).

While the source text only emphasizes the netizens' comments, the target text highlights the third person through expressions such as "a lot of netizens" and "and said it," indicating the third-party identity of the translator. Besides, it explains the reason for "a lot of netizens were touched by the story," thus leading the target readers to view the netizens' comments from an objective perspective. This approach not only enables the objective and accurate expression of opinions and viewpoints but also highlights the perspective differences between the original narrators and the re-narrators to foreign readers, leaving space for the readers to reflect on it.

## 3.3. Comparison between China's national images in source texts and target texts

In the process of translation, through the adaptation of the four main translation strategies mentioned above, the image in target texts becomes more positive with less controversial expressions as demonstrated in those examples. In this way, China's national image in target texts has become more approachable and respectable in international communication, which can better attract foreign readers' interests. From the perspective of foreign readers, they can see the progress in China's society through the translated texts. The reconstructed China's national image is more approachable and attractive.

## 4. Conclusion

The results indicate that the reconstruction of China's national image in translations is primarily achieved through the four main translation strategies proposed by Mona Baker: Temporal and spatial framing is mainly used in the lead-in section, implemented through domestication; selective appropriation of textual material is mainly used in the main body of the texts, achieved through addition and omission; framing by labeling is mainly used for translating Chinese buzzwords and neologisms, achieved through explanatory translation, transliteration, and equivalent expressions; repositioning of participants is primarily achieved by changing the person and tense. Through the translation process, the reconstructed national image is more positive and acceptable to foreign readers compared with the constructed national image in source texts. It can be concluded that reconstructing China's national image through soft news translation is an effective way to enhance China's international communication capability to better reconstruct China's national image during the process of translation.

## Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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