

A Study on the Current Status of English Translation and Standardization of Nanchang's Cultural Tourism Image Signs

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Abstract: A city's cultural and tourism image sign serves as a core text for its external communication. Taking Nanchang as the subject of this study, this paper examines the current state of its English translation and identifies issues such as inconsistent terminology, loss of cultural information and inappropriate use. The research establishes principles for standardization across four dimensions—accuracy, audience orientation, cultural adaptation and conciseness for dissemination. It proposes translation methods including the combined use of foreignization and domestication, cultural compensation and the reconstruction of functional equivalence, with the aim of providing theoretical and practical guidance for the English translation of cultural and tourism signs in Nanchang and similar cities.

Keywords: Nanchang; city image; public signs; standardization of English translation

Online publication: February 26, 2026

1. Introduction

Against the backdrop of globalization and international competition in the cultural and tourism industry, urban cultural and tourism image signs have become the core vehicle for a city's external cultural outreach and a “visual-linguistic” dual symbol of brand identity^[1]. The quality of their English translation directly shapes international audiences' cognitive frameworks regarding a city's historical heritage and cultural characteristics, serving as a key yardstick for measuring a city's international communication capabilities^[2]. As a nationally designated historical and cultural city and “the birthplace of the PLA”, Nanchang has successively introduced image signs such as “天下英雄城” “赣鄱明珠” going global. Nevertheless, the English versions of these cultural tourism image signs have always been spontaneous and fragmentary, and with many shortcomings including inconsistent translations, cultural loss, and pragmatic misalignment^[3], they have greatly compromised the international communication of the city's cultural and tourism brand. The existing scholarly literature on the external urban communication translation has mainly concentrated on

super-tier-one cities like Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou and Shenzhen, whereas the study of historical and cultural cities in central China has not been well explored systematically^[4].

The cultural and tourism symbols of Nanchang are thus used as the topic of research in this paper. Through multimodal corpus gathering and comparative textual analysis, it objectively represents the present status of English translation and the main problems that have been identified. This paper develops a system of standardization principles and operational instructions for English translation that can be applied in the Nanchang cultural tourism setting by combining the theories of Dynamic Equivalence and Skopos theory. It also produces reproducible translation methods and conducts case studies with the purpose of offering theoretical and practical references for the standardization of external publicity translation in Nanchang and other cities.

2. Current Status of English Translation for Nanchang's Cultural and Tourism Signs

In order to achieve an overview of the present English translation of the cultural and tourism signs in Nanchang, the paper undertook a field survey in more than 20 important sites in the city and gathered over 200 samples including four categories such as attraction introductions, revolutionary tourism, culinary specialities, and guidance and warning signs.

Sample analysis and literature review indicate that the present English version of the cultural and tourism signs in Nanchang has many significant issues that greatly affect the quality of the translation and the nature of cross-cultural communication in four particular aspects^[5]. To begin with, there is inconsistency in the translations. A similar sign can be found in various versions in different media or places, e.g., “天下英雄城” has been translated as “City of Heroes” “A City of Heroic Legacy” “Hero City Nanchang”, which casts doubt on the consistency of brand recognition. Secondly, literal translations cause the loss of cultural imagery. An example is “Pearl of Ganpo”, which is a literal translation of “赣鄱明珠”. Readers of English do not have a mental image of “Ganpo” but “Pearl” itself brings images of the ocean, which is extremely incompatible with the geographical location of Nanchang as an inland center. Third, there is no functional orientation. Cultural and tourism public signs are inherently designed to evoke an emotion. However, the current English translations tend to be merely static statements. For example, “红色故都·革命摇篮” is translated into “Red Capital, Cradle of Revolution”. Although semantically correct, it does not provide any emotional connection or rhythm and thus, cannot instill the urge to explore another culture. Lastly, there is no professional proofreading system and standard procedures. Often translations are performed on a part-time basis by nonprofessionals and this leads to common problems like inconsistent capitalization, incorrect punctuation and poor grammar^[6]. In general, the English translation of Nanchang's cultural and tourism signs is still in its initial, experiential stage and needs to change its paradigm immediately toward cross-cultural communication through standardization.

3. Principles for the Standardization of Nanchang's Cultural and Tourism Signs

Standardization of English translations of cultural and tourist image signs plays a central role in enhancing the quality of Nanchang translations and promoting the internationalization of the cultural and tourism industry in the city. When considering the unique attributes that characterize Nanchang's cultural and tourism sector, as well as the demands of cross-cultural communication, it is recommended that these translations be

standardized in accordance with the following “Four Principles”.

3.1. Principle of Accuracy

The principle of accuracy is the cornerstone of standardization. In Nanchang’s cultural and tourism signs, proper nouns such as “滕王阁” and “八一起义纪念馆”, historical events such as the “南昌起义”, and geographical terms such as “赣江” and “鄱阳湖” must be strictly aligned with the standards of the National Committee for Standardization of Geographical Names, authoritative dictionaries, and internationally accepted translations. The creation of neologisms, the fabrication of phrases, and the misuse of pinyin must be strictly avoided^[7]. As the texts of these signs concern the city’s image, any inaccuracy may affect international visitors’ correct perception of Nanchang or even lead to misunderstandings. Therefore, zero tolerance for inaccuracies must be ensured.

3.2. Audience-Oriented Principle

The audience-oriented principle requires that translations fully take into account the needs of native English-speaking readers. Guided by Nida’s theory of Dynamic Equivalence and Vermeer’s Skopos Theory, translations must prioritize achieving the same functions of appeal, emotional impact and information transmission as the source text, enabling foreign visitors to experience Nanchang’s unique charm. At the same time, consideration must be given to their cognitive schemas, cultural acceptance thresholds and the psychology of tourism decision-making. The vocabulary and phrases that are familiar and easily comprehensible must be used in order to obtain convergence of the so-called reader response and arouse interest to visit.

3.3. Principle of Cultural Adaptation

In response to the abundance of untranslatable culturally loaded words about Nanchang, it is possible to apply a cultural compensation approach in explaining the cultural background, use the imagery substitution method to express the meaning with the help of similar imagery, or apply the functional downgrading approach to reduce the complexity of expressions^[8]. This provides cross-cultural readability without cultural condescension or capitulation, allowing foreign tourists to gain a better understanding of the cultural essence of Nanchang.

3.4. Principle of Conciseness for Dissemination

This principle states that cultural and tourist symbols should have the characteristics of a catchphrase. A maximum of 3–7 meaningful words are required in the translations of Nanchang’s cultural and tourism signs, and they should have a compact structure and a fast rhythm that matches the stylistic and rhythmic aspects of English advertising text, i.e., rhyme and repetition, to make them more effective and memorable. It helps remember, cite, and further spread it, thereby promoting the popularization of the cultural and tourism image of Nanchang and bringing more foreign tourists.

4. English Translation Methods and Case Analysis Based on Standardization Principles

Considering the aforementioned four principles of standardization and the variety of cultural and tourism signs in Nanchang, this section will discuss a systematic way of translating English versions of the image sign of Nanchang urban culture as well as tourism, both in terms of translation methods and practical

procedures with case studies.

4.1. The Dialectical Combination of Foreignization and Domestication

City image signs have numerous culturally loaded words that are specific to the locality. The essential difficulty in translation and adaptation work is the overcoming of cultural barriers to achieve successful communication. To address this, this paper proposes a translation approach that can dialectically balance foreignization and domestication. Namely, when it comes to key concepts that are used to identify and build an image, the strategy of foreignization needs to be applied to preserve cultural specificity and gain international recognition; however, in case of supplementary and explanatory information, domestication strategy should be implemented to promote readability by using the expressions that are more familiar to the target audience^[9].

Example 1

ST: 天下英雄城—南昌

TT: The City of Heroes: Nanchang

The translation has a nice mix between foreignization and domestication. On the one hand, the domestication is implemented through the use of the phrase structure, which is familiar to English readers, i.e., the City of Heroes, to reflect the original imagery of the Chinese expression“英雄城”. Not only does this comply with the linguistic norms in English but it also maintains the associative space of the ST, thus, improving the readability of the translated material. Conversely, the foreignization strategy is applied when Nanchang is directly referred to as a geographical reference, which helps to preserve the local cultural specificity of the city and contribute to its global fame.

Example 2

ST: 洪城古韵，魅力南昌

TT: Ancient Charm of Hongcheng (Nanchang)

This translation also uses a combination of foreignization and domestication strategies. Domestication strategy is applied to express the attributes of both “古韵” and “魅力” in a way that is familiar and easy to comprehend in English, thus it conforms to the linguistic tendencies and mental models of English-speaking readers. “Hongcheng (Nanchang)” adopts the strategy of foreignization, on the other hand. “洪城” is another name of Nanchang, but by keeping its local specificity, the addition of Nanchang makes the readers aware of the city that they are referring to. It is an approach that retains the cultural singularity of Nanchang as well as ensures proper transmission of information which will assist in promoting Nanchang’s international reputation.

4.2. Compensatory Translation of Culturally Specific Elements

In the case of classical phrases and proper names in the cultural and tourism signs of Nanchang that have deep historical references and cultural resonance, the act of translating should not be restricted to mechanical correspondence but must take a step further into applying the idea of explanatory compensation coupled with pragmatic adaptation. The suggested approach implies that, without changing the essential cultural component, the gap between the languages of China and the West in terms of implication of subjects

and rhetorical rules can be bridged by adding contextual details, changing the structure of sentences, and changing the voice in order to make sure that the translation is readable and communicatively effective in a cross-cultural scenario.

Example 3

ST: 物华天宝，人杰地灵

TT: Richly endowed with natural resources and glorified by outstanding talents.

This phrase originates from the *Preface to the Pavilion of Prince Teng*, which features an elided subject and is dense with allusions, creating a significant tension between its surface meaning and its deeper historical connotations. The explanatory compensatory translation approach adopted, through the use of the passive voice and indirect reference, effectively mitigates the subjective evaluative tone of the ST, better aligning with the objective expression conventions of English tourism discourse, and clearly conveys the core image of Nanchang as a place of “abundant natural resources and flourishing culture”.

Example 4

ST: 八一起义，军旗升起的地方

TT: The Birthplace of the PLA: Where the First Shot of Independence Was Fired

The slogan has a very particularized revolutionary historical message. A literal translation can run the risk of a mechanical translation of a political lexicon that creates a cross-cultural cognitive gap. The compensatory translation starts by inserting the phrase “The Birthplace of the PLA” in order to overcome the gap in the knowledge of the overseas audiences about the recent past of China; secondly, it modifies the phrase “军旗升起” as “Where the First Shot of Independence Was Fired”, adopting the universal discourse pattern of anti-colonial and national independence struggles globally to reflect the subtle implications of “armed struggle and the establishment of the country”. Contextual supplementation and the change in a narrative logic make the translation ensure that, without compromising the idea of revolutionary culture, it finds a middle ground between historical rigour and international acceptability, which completely illustrates the cross-cultural effectiveness of compensatory strategies in the face of highly contextualised proper terms.

4.3. Contextual Reconstruction Based on Functional Equivalence

In the case of informational and persuasive cultural and tourism signs, the main element of translation quality is ensuring that the equivalent communicative functions are realized in the target language culture. Through the functional equivalence principle and by taking into account the type of sign and communication conditions, methods like transliteration combined with additional explanation, keeping cultural specificities, and functional substitution can be applied in a flexible manner^[10]. At the same time, there needs to be a tiered usage standard to make sure that cultural authenticity does not interfere with the communicative effectiveness.

Example 5

ST: 绳金塔

TT: Shengjin Tower (Built in the Tang Dynasty more than 1, 100 years ago, it served as the guardian of

Nanchang)

This translation is strictly based on the concept of functional equivalence and satisfies the criteria to translate informational symbols. The translation preserves the phonetic spelling of the name as “Shengjin” which is the main cultural symbol and maintains the specific cultural traits of the place. Simultaneously, it also includes the year of construction to give the audience abroad a clear idea of the historical background and the term “guardian” to summarize briefly the cultural role of Shengjin Tower as the treasure of Nanchang, which conveys its actual value correctly. It does not aim at a word-to-word equivalence, but rather attempts to recreate what would be natural and efficient information delivery in the English environment, and thus serves its purpose of information transmission without compromising the efficiency of cultural exchange.

Example 6

ST: 一江两岸灯光秀

TT1: Nanchang Riverside Light Spectacular

TT 2: Gan River Night Illumination

The sign is a very common type of a text containing information and persuasion. A literal rendering would probably make the person confused about the spatial positioning and be unappealing to tourists. In accordance with the principle of functional equivalence, the translation has been modified to suit different media settings: the main promotional image has been translated as “Nanchang Riverside Light Spectacular” in TT1, where “Spectacular” is used to highlight the visual effect and the feeling of immersion, which is consistent with the persuasive style of English language tourism advertising; with regard to physical space and online directions, it has been translated as “Gan River Night Illumination” in TT2, focusing on the geographical position and the character of the event to satisfy the practical requirements of visitors to locate the event quickly and navigate the route. Through adapting the translation of the identical slogan into the particular situation, the method not only prevents information overload but also provides an exact balance between cultural attraction and efficiency of the state services, successfully proving the practical usefulness of reconstruction strategies based on standardized regulations.

5. Conclusion

The English translation of Nanchang’s urban cultural and tourism branding signs is closely related to how effectively the city communicates with the world and creates an image worldwide, being a major factor in the internationalisation of the cultural and tourism industry in Nanchang. This paper has identified some of the main problems that are currently facing the English translation of Nanchang cultural and tourism signs through field research and textual analysis, which include the inconsistency of the terminology, erosion of cultural imagery, nonfunctionalism, and the absence of a professional proofreading system. In turn, this study sets up four standardization principles, namely accuracy, audience orientation, cultural adaptation, and conciseness for effective dissemination. It further proposes three main translation strategies—the combination of foreignization and domestication, compensatory translation of culturally specific items, and functional equivalence via contextual reconstruction, and demonstrates their applicability in particular contexts. In the future, it is required to enhance the integrated supervision of relevant English translation activities, set up professional mechanisms of translation and proofreading and improve the standardization system of Nanchang’s cultural and tourism signs, contributing to the promotion of effective cross-cultural

exchange and offering an example for the standardization of English translations of cultural and tourism signs in other similar historic and cultural cities of central China.

Disclosure statement

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Funding

Funded by Nanchang City Social Science Planning Project in 2025: A Study on the Translation Standardization of Nanchang's City Brand in the Context of Cultural Tourism Integration (Project No.: SK2025092)

Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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