

# The Utilization of Functional Equivalence Theory and Context Hierarchy Theory in the Translation of Excellent Traditional Chinese Culture

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**Abstract:** Foreign translation and international communication of excellent traditional culture is the key issue of Chinese translation and cultural communication in the new century, and it is also an important cultural behavior and cultural strategy for national development and exchange. Based on the advantages of Chinese language and culture, Chinese culture and its unique perspective are introduced to the world in a more comprehensive way. The theory of functional equivalence is an important theoretical basis for the translation of literary works, emphasizing the theme of dynamic language. In the theory of context hierarchy, cultural context corresponds to discourse genre, situational context corresponds to register, and contextual context corresponds to language expression form, which has a good guiding effect on the foreign translation of excellent traditional culture. The research results of this paper are conducive to creating a new translation model with Chinese characteristics, eliminating misreading and misunderstanding in the Western world, and improving the acceptance of Chinese cultural concepts in foreign countries.

**Keywords:** Functional Equivalence Theory; Context Hierarchy Theory; Traditional Chinese Culture; Foreign Translation

## 1. Introduction

The foreign translation and international communication of excellent traditional culture is the key issue of Chinese translation and cultural communication in the new century, and it is also an important cultural behavior and cultural strategy for national development and communication. Based on the advantages of Chinese language and culture, we will introduce Chinese culture and unique perspective to the world in a more comprehensive way. To build the image of China as a responsible major country and effectively increase the acceptance of Chinese cultural concepts abroad. Following the new concepts, new categories and new expressions that integrate both Chinese and foreign countries, we strive to create a new mode of translation with Chinese characteristics, and correct and eliminate misreading and misunderstanding, as well as deliberate distortion and slander in the Western world. The foreign translation of excellent traditional culture should focus on the accurate expression of the ideological connotation and values of excellent Chinese culture, and condense the translation content of excellent Chinese culture that can be accepted and understood by both Chinese and western audiences. Only by highlighting the ideological connotation of excellent Chinese culture and highlighting its values in translation can we better inherit and spread excellent traditional Chinese culture [1].

Functional equivalence theory is an important theoretical basis for the translation of literary works, emphasizing the dynamic language theme, but pursuing the strict correspondence of external language forms. Many literary works have used this translation method for reference, and it also plays an important guiding role in the external translation of excellent traditional culture. The context hierarchy theory of systemic functional linguistics points out that each context level has a corresponding level in the language system, and the cultural context corresponds to the discourse genre, the situational context corresponds to the register, and the contextual context corresponds to the language expression form, which has a good guiding effect on the foreign translation of excellent traditional culture.

## 2. Functional Equivalence Theory is Applied to the External Translation of Excellent Traditional Culture

Eugene Nida, a famous American linguist and translation theorist, linked translation and linguistics, proposed "formal equivalence" and "dynamic equivalence", and later proposed "functional equivalence" to replace "dynamic equivalence". In order to accurately reproduce the culture of the source language and eliminate cultural differences, translators need to follow three steps: First, strive to create a translation that conforms to the semantics of the original text and reflects the cultural characteristics of the original text. However, two languages represent two different cultures, which may have similar elements but cannot be identical. Therefore, it is impossible for a perfect translation to fully show the cultural connotation of the original text, and it can only reproduce the source language culture to the maximum extent. Second, if the meaning and culture cannot be taken into account at the same time, the translator has to abandon formal equivalence and achieve the purpose of reproducing the semantic meaning and culture of the original text by changing the form of the original text in the target text. Third, if the change of form is not enough to express the semantics and culture of the original text, the translation technique of "trauma" can be used to solve the cultural differences, so that the source language and the target language can achieve meaning equivalence. "Heavy damage" refers to the transformation of the deep structure of the source language into the surface structure of the target language, that is, the cultural connotation of the source language article is explained and explained by the vocabulary of the target language.

The theory of "functional equivalence" is also defined as the theory of "readers' equal response". Eugene Nida pointed out that "translation is to reproduce the information of the source language from semantic to stylistic in the most appropriate, natural and equivalent language" [2]. In the process of translation, it is necessary to ensure the accuracy of the content and meaning of the original text, and pay attention to the expression mode and expression style in the translation process, so that the language meaning can be accurately expressed in the form most acceptable to readers [3]. Functional equivalence includes lexical equivalence, syntactic equivalence, textual equivalence and stylistic equivalence. This thesis mainly studies lexical equivalence and textual equivalence.

### 2.1 Lexical Equivalence

The cultural differences between China and the west are reflected in language as follows: English pays attention to language form, has careful syntactic structure, and uses many auxiliary words and phrase structures. Chinese takes predicate as the center and develops sentences in order of time or space. In both English and Chinese vocabulary, there are multiple meanings of one word, multiple words with one meaning, word overlap and vacant words. Therefore, at the lexical level, the same meaning needs to be expressed in different forms to achieve semantic, grammatical and cultural equivalence in lexical translation [4].

First, the vocabulary is exactly the same. As a part of culture, vocabulary reflects human's knowledge of the world, and human's knowledge of the world has similarities. Therefore, although different languages differ in characters, grammar, and pronunciation, there are words with exactly the same meaning. If only the literal translation strategy can achieve functional equivalence, then there is no need to adjust the translation, and the information obtained by the target language readers from these words is equivalent to that obtained by the source language readers.

Second, partial equivalence of vocabulary. English and Chinese come from different cultural backgrounds. Vocabulary, as a component of language, is a concentrated generalization of the subjective world and the objective world. The difference of lexical concepts between source language and target language comes from different habits and life trials, and different understandings of the subjective world and the objective world. Partial equivalence of words means that there are overlaps in the meaning of English words and Chinese words, and there are also overlaps in the meaning. In order to achieve functional equivalence, it is necessary to find the corresponding words in the target language according to the context in which the words are used.

Third, the vocabulary is completely unequal. Under different cultural backgrounds, human beings have different ways of thinking and value standards, as well as different ways of observing the world. Therefore, languages will show different cultural characteristics and national customs. With the increasingly frequent cultural exchanges between China and the West, translators often encounter the situation of completely unequal vocabulary. Therefore, it is necessary to adopt diversified translation methods in order to be faithful to the original text to the greatest extent and achieve dynamic

equivalence. Some English words cannot be found in Chinese, so literal translation, free translation and transliteration can be used, or a combination of these methods can be used to achieve the ideal effect.

## **2.2 Textual Equivalence**

Discourse is subordinate to the unit of language use, so the analysis of discourse should not only analyze the language itself, but also combine the meaning and function of language in a specific context. Text equivalence requires the translator to consider from a macro perspective to make the translation smooth and natural.

First, adjust the word order. Due to the differences in idiomatic expressions and syntactic relations between Chinese and English, word order is also different. If the translator does not change the order of the sentences, it will be difficult for the reader to understand. Word order adjustment is important, which means that the translator should change the sentence order to help the reader understand. Changing the order of the text makes the translation more smooth and maintains the full meaning of the original text.

Second, additional translation. Supplementary translation is the addition of some details that cannot be directly expressed in the translation, but are very important to the reader. This is the most commonly used translation technique in traditional cultural translation. Sometimes, it can make the translation smoother and more complete. Use a few examples to illustrate. Supplementary translation can improve the quality of the translated text in a simple and effective way. It can not only express the meaning of the original text, but also deepen the reader's understanding. It is a very practical translation technique.

Third, synchronous rhetoric. Rhetoric is also a method or means to modify and adjust sentences to improve the expression function of language in a specific way. Different rhetorical devices play different roles in the text. In the classical works of traditional culture, the use of rhetorical devices is very common. When translating a sentence involving rhetorical devices, the translator must first understand the meaning of the original sentence, then analyze the role of rhetorical devices in the original sentence, and finally select the most appropriate words in the target language to complete the translation. It is best to keep the same rhetorical style as the original text, so that readers can feel the excellent writing skills of the original author. Sometimes keeping the same rhetorical device as the original sentence in the translation can make the translation more vivid, express stronger emotions, and leave a deeper impression on the reader.

## **3. The Theory of Context Hierarchy is Applied to the External Translation of Excellent Traditional Culture**

The concept of context, first proposed by Polish anthropologist Malinowski, refers to the immediate environment of language activities and is divided into situational context and cultural context [5]. Later linguists divided context into three levels: cultural context, situational context and contextual context.

### **3.1 Cultural Context**

Cultural context is one of the important linguistic categories to study the use and function of language, including political, historical, philosophical, scientific and folk cultural consciousness at that time. Cultural context was first proposed by Malinowski, a British anthropologist. Each language community has its own history, culture, customs, social conventions, ways of thinking, moral concepts and value orientations, which reflect the characteristics of a particular language community and constitute the cultural context. The cultural background is reflected in the form of language in the discourse, which is called the cultural component in the discourse. Lado puts forward three aspects of form, meaning and distribution when comparing cultural components. Form is the expression form of language, meaning is the cultural connotation embodied by language form, and distribution is the mode of expression of form and meaning in discourse. To deal with the cultural elements of the source language, various factors must be considered comprehensively, including the history, the background of The Times, the customs and so on, and different countermeasures must be adopted to build a bridge of cultural exchange with the target language.

The use of language is dependent on the cultural context. Without the cultural context, the use of language is meaningless or it is impossible to accurately use language to express the central idea. Cultural context and language use are just like the relationship between the lock and the key, and they

cannot be separated. According to the specific cultural context, only a specific language can be chosen to express a specific meaning. Cultural context is an indispensable part of language communication, and it also restricts the progress of language communication. Cultural context helps both parties to better understand each other's expressions and avoid embarrassing incidents. If you want to accurately express yourself or understand the speaker's point of view and position, it is necessary to grasp the cultural differences between different ethnic groups.

In the process of foreign translation of excellent traditional culture, culture must be combined with the cultural context on which it depends. The ideas of all ethnic groups are interlinked, but the premise of interconnectivity is to fully understand the cultural differences among ethnic groups, and be able to master the languages of other ethnic groups and use them freely. Translation is always the process of making the target text according to the original text. Therefore, only on the premise of fully and comprehensively understanding the cultural context characteristics of the original text can we accurately understand and grasp the meaning potential of the original text, and consciously compare and contrast the cultural context between the original text and the target text in the translation process, so as to choose a more appropriate translation strategy.

### ***3.2 Situational Context***

The role of context in the translation of traditional culture is implicit rather than apparent, so it cannot be ignored. In order to make translation more accurate, it is necessary to consider not only the explicit factors such as vocabulary and grammar, but also the recessive factor of context, so that the contextual function of the situation can be manifested. Context appears as the background and implies that in order to accurately understand and grasp traditional culture, it is not enough to just clarify the meaning of language and vocabulary, but also must take into account the context, because the same language has different meanings in different contexts. The characteristics of literary works in traditional culture are rich in imagination, good at describing, good at writing and good at artistic conception. Translation is the reproduction of language art, and the translator not only undertakes the translation of the linguistic meaning, expression methods, narrative means and stylistic structure of the original text, but also bears the heavy responsibility of preserving the feelings, charm, artistic conception and style of the original text [6].

It helps translators grasp the true thoughts and emotions of traditional culture objectively and accurately. Many classical works of traditional culture render the environment and shape the atmosphere through narrative, depiction and landscape painting. That is to say, with the description of a "situation" to express real intentions and thoughts, to express certain feelings. Understand the original text accurately with reference to the time and space sequence of historical events. The people, objects and events in a text all exist, occur and develop in a certain space and time. Time and space is the most basic frame of reference for constructing discourse, and the time and space ways in which people, things and events occur and develop are closely related to the ways of language expression. With reference to the time and space in which the plot takes place, correct reasoning is carried out according to custom and reason. Understand the temperament, gender and age, status and cultural literacy of the participants in the situation. Conversational language is quite common in traditional literary works, and the author shows the vivid personality of characters through the dialogue between characters. Therefore, in translation, it is necessary to consider the identity, occupation and personality characteristics of the language communicators, not to be bound by the original language, so as to make the story reasonable. It is necessary to form a general idea through every detail, through the psychological, facial expression, behavior and background association of the characters, so as to properly reproduce the story in the original.

### ***3.3 Contextual Context***

In the context theory model of systemic functional linguistics, context is at the lowest level, reflecting the characteristics of the contextual variables in the above level in the form of discourse. Context belongs to the linguistic environment that embodies the meaning potential in the form of specific language, and directly relates to whether a discourse is a complete and coherent semantic unit. That is to say, context determines discourse, which is realized in two ways: First, the integration of the three meta-functions of language. Second, linguistic formal means or cohesion, including reference, ellipsis and repetition.

Textual features include structural features and non-structural features, the former refers to thematic

structure and information structure, the latter refers to the internal cohesion of the text. Cohesive devices include grammar and vocabulary. The former includes reference, ellipsis, substitution and connection. The latter includes word repetition, synonymy or antisense, hyponymy or local relations, and lexical collocation. Cohesion is expressed in the form of language, not only the formal organization and connection function between sentences, but also a semantic concept and a kind of correlation in meaning. It is through these means that one part of a discourse is meaningfully connected with another [7]. Cohesion has the function of semantic organization and connection, that is, cohesion organically organizes the meaning of other parts together with its own meaning.

In the process of excellent traditional culture translation, the translator needs to analyze and interpret the characteristics of the text in order to fully and accurately understand the meaning potentials contained in the original text, and reproduce these potentials in the target text in an appropriate way. For the specific expression and wording of the target text, translators can adopt different translation strategies according to the requirements of effective and fluent expression in the context [8]. For example, the smooth expression of the translation can be achieved by changing voice, adding vocabulary, changing parts of speech, changing structure and so on. No matter what kind of expression is different from the original text, the translator should always pay attention to whether the meaning potential and function of the original text can be preserved and reflected in the translation to the greatest extent.

#### 4. Conclusions

In the course of historical development, all ethnic groups in China have jointly created a colorful, extensive and profound Chinese culture. The foreign translation and international dissemination of excellent traditional culture is conducive to showing the world the historical origin, production mode, customs and development status of the diversified integration of Chinese culture, enhancing the international community's understanding of China's multi-ethnic national conditions and multi-culture, and also conducive to the export-oriented development of excellent national cultural industries.

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