# A Study of Corpus-Based Translation for China's Global Communication from the Perspective of Critical Discourse — A Case Study of the *2011&2022 Report on the Work of the Government*

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*Abstract*—As China's comprehensive national power continues to grow and its global influence expands, China's status in the international arena is receiving increasing attention, and the enhancement of its international status requires an international discourse that is compatible with it. This research focuses on the analysis of the translation of Chinese political discourse represented by *Report on the Work of the Government (RWG)*, and selected corpus is the Chinese and English versions of 2011&2022 *Report on the Work of the Government*. The translation of RWG not only contains a large amount of ideological content, but also requires the realization of the communication effect in the context of the target language. At the same time, the RWG requires a high degree of loyalty to the original text, but also pays attention to the acceptance and reaction of readers. Traditional domestication strategies cannot adapt to the dialectical and dynamic relationship between discourse and social practice, so this study adopts the interdisciplinary perspective of Critical Discourse Analysis to analyze the corpus.

*Index Terms*—Critical discourse analysis, overseas-targeted publicity translation, cross-cultural communication, *Report on the Work of the Government*

## I. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the international community has paid close attention to the development of China's political, economic, social and cultural fields. Against the background of deepening international exchanges and increasingly rich international communication channels, China's foreign communication is not only a key source of information for the world to understand China, but also a core element in the construction of China's foreign discourse system, which is crucial to the struggle for international discourse power. With language as the link and communication effect as the purpose, foreign communication accomplishes the interpretation of culture and values and the construction of national image in the process of discourse practice, mainly in the form of foreign propaganda translation. Therefore, the effectiveness of foreign translation practice is related to the construction of foreign discourse system, and the study of foreign translation should be given sufficient attention.

In essence, foreign affairs translation is a kind of cross-cultural communication activity, and its research is interdisciplinary and dynamic, and the exploration and development of related theories and practices are the key to

the realization of its communication purpose. This study focuses on the foreign translation of Chinese political discourse represented by the government work report, and the selected corpus is the English version of the 2011 & 2022 government work report, and the 2011 & 2022 The State of the Union Address (SUA).

The translation of the government work report not only contains a lot of ideological content, but also aims to achieve the communication effect in the translated context, which requires a high degree of fidelity to the original text, but also pays attention to the readers' acceptance and reaction. The study adopts a supra-disciplinary perspective of critical discourse analysis to analyze the corpus.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter reviews the history and current situation of overseas-targeted publicity translation, publicity translation from the perspective of Critical Discourse Analysis, as well as the *Report on the Work of the Government* and the related research results of translation studies, so as to establish the necessity of this study.

### A. Current Research Situation of Publicity Translation

Before clarifying the concept of "overseas-targeted publicity translation", it is necessary to define the meaning of the word "publicity". For a long time, "publicity" has been interpreted as "foreign propaganda" or "foreign communication", and no matter which of these interpretations is used to understand "foreign propaganda", from the perspective of the operation of international society, "National propaganda or communication is the basis for the continuity of the world system" [1]. Effective communication between countries and nations, and between peoples and nationalities through information can increase trust and release doubts, and reduce the risk of conflict.

From the definition given in "*Chinese Encyclopedia*", "Propaganda" refers to "the social behavior of using various symbols to spread certain ideas to influence people's thoughts and actions", while "Communication" refers to "the mutual exchange and sharing of ideas, concepts and opinions, the process of sharing information, ideas and opinions with others. There are some differences between these two definitions: "Propaganda" emphasizes the one-way nature of information dissemination, and the audience is "influenced". "Communication", emphasizes the two-way nature and interactivity of information exchange, the audience has a sense of active communication, and the

information is "shared".

In Chinese, the use of the word "Propaganda" can be traced back to the Eastern Han Dynasty. In the West, "Propaganda" originated from the "Congregation for Propaganda of the Faith" founded by Roman Catholic Pope Gregory XV in 1622, which "refers to the dissemination of doctrine through the use of various literary and linguistic symbols by missionaries" [1]. In the modern Chinese, the term "Propaganda" refers to mass communication through the media by state agencies, enterprises, institutions, schools, and other institutions. As Cai [2] points out, "foreign propaganda" as a kind of outward-looking international communication, is a Chinese term that refers to the act of disseminating information about China to the outside world through various forms and channels, and propagating China's views and attitudes in international community.

To sum up, the term "Propaganda" has a negative connotation in the West, where the mainstream view is that "Propaganda" refers to the provision of planned, non-comprehensive, filtered information and ideas by propagandists to their audiences, thereby influencing their thoughts and behaviors [3]. The concept of "propaganda" includes the control of opinions by descriptions, rumors, reports, pictures, and various other forms of social communication [4].

In view of the misunderstanding of this wording in foreign communication, the central government decided in the mid- to late 1990s that the English translation of the word "propaganda" would no longer use "propaganda" but "publicity". As Zhao [5] points out, there is no big difference between "foreign communication" and "foreign propaganda" in Chinese. The use of "External communication" is to avoid the pejorative connotation of the word "Propaganda". The British Concise Encyclopedia of Great Britain defines the term "Communication" as "the exchange of people's intentions with each other through a common system of symbols." From the point of view of word meaning, the word "Communication" does not contain utilitarian purposes and is more acceptable to the audience. It can be said that "Communication" has a broader connotation compared with "Propaganda", and the latter is a form of the former.

Foreign propaganda translation is not only a special type of translation, but also a special type of propaganda, because there are differences in the audiences of the original translation, and its propaganda process also involves the conversion between two languages and cultures. As Li [6] says, "the essence of translation is the decoding and recoding activity aimed at conveying information, and the purpose of social communication is achieved through the conversion of two language codes.", which is also the core meaning of foreign propaganda translation. And Zhang [7] classifies different English translations of the term "outreach translation" into four types according to their emphasis: 1) basic direct translation, 2) emphasis on the international nature of outreach translation, 3) emphasis on the audience aspect of outreach translation, 4) and emphasis on the informational nature of outreach translation.

The author checked the CNKI and found that there were 18 doctoral dissertations on the topic of "publicity translation", and there were different translations of this term in the English translation titles, but most of the English titles adopted the translation method that emphasized the international nature of foreign translation, which is listed as Table I.

TABLE I: DOCTORAL DISSERTATIONS ON THE TOPIC OF "PUBLICITY TRANSLATION" IN CNKI

| Title | Translation |
|---|---|
| Title 1 | Translation For China's Global Communication |
| Title 2 | Translation for China's International Communication |
| Title 3 | China's Foreign Publicity Translation |
| Title 4 | C-E translation for global communication |
| Title 5 | C-E translation for global communication |
| Title 6 | C-E translation for global communication |
| Title 7 | Chinese-English translation for China's global communication |
| Title 8 | Translation for China's international communication |
| Title 9 | Translation of city promotion materials |
| Title 10 | Translation for China's global communication |
| Title 11 | C-E translation of minority culture |
| Title 12 | Translation in international publicity |
| Title 13 | C-E Translation for International Publicity |
| Title 14 | Translation Studies for China's International Communication |
| Title 15 | Translation for China's International Communication |
| Title 16 | C-E Translation of Political Discourse for Global Communication |
| Title 17 | International Publicity |
| Title 18 | Translation for China's global communication |

The various English translations of "overseas-targeted publicity translation" reflect the international nature, which also emphasizes the need to understand the concept and connotation of overseas-targeted publicity translation in the context of international communication, and to pay attention to the international communication effect of publicity translation. Zeng [8] points out that foreign propaganda translation "focuses on the transmission of objective fact-based 'information' and the social effect/degree of foreign communication, while the aesthetic meaning or personality characteristics loaded by textual symbols are often subordinated". Chinese political discourse contains the expression of ideological meaning and a large number of culturally loaded words, and translators should pay attention to the cross-cultural communicative function of foreign propaganda translation in the translation process.

With the deepening of intercultural and interdisciplinary communication in translation, the understanding of the communicative function of translation practice has gradually attracted the attention of scholars. For example, Nida put forward the view that "translation is communication". And Lv [9] also pointed out that "translation is a kind of information dissemination activity, a cross-cultural information exchange activity, and its essence is communication". From this, it can be seen that "translation" itself has the property of "communication", and then "publicity translation" emphasizes more on the direction of communication and the clarity of communicative effect.

*B. Previous Studies on Critical Discourse Analysis*

CDA, developed in western linguistics, was first used by Fairclough in the article *Critical and Descriptive Goals in Discourse Analysis* published in 1985, and later became popular in the highly influential book Language and Power written by Fairclough [10]. Based on System Functional Linguistics, CDA aims to analyze the relationships among

language, power, and ideology, revealing how texts are produced in the social, political, and cultural environment. CDA, a newer theory of discourse analysis, differs from other discourse analysis theories in that it pays more attention to social issues. As a typical official discourse, official statements and documents, namely, the political discourse representing the position of the state and the government, have become hot spots for critical linguists.

The highlight of the latest progress of CDA is that it absorbs the results of corpus linguistics with enriching the research tools and expanding the theoretical horizon. CDA lacks a typical method of collecting corpora. Generally speaking, it finds some key vocabulary and language structures in the text or some special rhetorical phenomena by intuition of the researchers with a time-consuming and labor-intensive process [11]. The retrieval function and statistical methods of corpus linguistics provide great convenience for CDA. The corpus method can reveal some language patterns and information that cannot be found by other means, which promotes the comprehensive and accurate analysis of CDA with qualitative and quantitative analysis.

According to linguistics, literature and cultural theory and translation theory, corpus-based translation study systematically analyzes the nature of translation, translation process and translation phenomena taking real bilingual corpus or translation corpus as research subjects and taking data statistics and theoretical analysis as research methods. Translation can be regarded as a kind of distinct discourse or discourse practice, which means that CDA can be used to analyze the ideology in translation text or translation practice [12]. It means that it will be more objective and scientific to reveal the ideological factors and text effect behind the characteristics of translated texts and the translation process and the impact of translation on ideology by using corpus-based CDA. Wang [13] analyzes stance taking in the interpreting activities of Chinese political discourse based on the corpus-based CDA. Critical reading in translation studies opens up the field to innovative concepts, methods of research, and perspectives from a wide range of traditions (Mona, 2010). Based on small self-built corpus, from CDA perspective, Gumul [14] comparatively analyzes the Polish translation text and the original English text in the Polish magazine Forum and found that the ideology of the two kinds of texts has changed. A corpus-based CDA translation study can make the findings more scientific and objective [12].

Based on parallel corpus study, Zhu [15] concentrates on the use of first-person plural pronoun in the 2000–2009 RWG. She finds that compared with the source text, the number of the first-person plural pronoun in the English translation has increased by 14.28 times. According to CDA, which claims that the choice of personal pronouns is influenced and restricted by social status and power relations between both sides of communication, Zhu points out that the translator of RWG aimed to highlight the authority of RWG by frequently using first-person plural pronouns [15]. In a word, corpus-based CDA which is more objective and scientific can be utilized to analyze the ideological factors lying behind the features of translated texts and the impact of translation on ideology.

## C. Previous Studies of the Translation of the Report on the Work of the Government

In terms of linguistic characteristics, the RWG is a speech of political nature, and its wording and expressions are precise, refined and standardized, and have been formed by a thousand refinements [16], while "as a synthesis of written and spoken language, the RWG should reflect the compatibility of the two in terms of sentence selection and arrangement.

Each year's RWG contains a large number of new concepts and new expressions of political terms, and a large proportion of these terms have distinctive Chinese cultural characteristics, such as "the fundamentals of the economy", "ensure stability in six key areas and effectively meet six priorities", "subsistence allowances", "run-down urban areas", "just as a blacksmith in the past would spend years forging the perfect sword", "spending on big-ticket items" and so on (the above words are selected from the 2022 RWG). The RWG has a high number of four-letter words and prose sentences, and the rhythm of the text is strong, which can highlight the tone of the reporter.

Needham and Porkert [17] and Sechrest and Zaidi [18] list some problems appearing when translating the content of cross-cultural communication, which reflects the challenging of translating Chinese RWG. Jia Yuling also point out the difficulties of translating Chinese RWG owing to the existence of Chinese culture-loaded words [19]. And there are some scholars who have studied the English translation of RWG based on the corpus-based studies. For instance, according to the corpus technology, Di and Yang [20]. analyze the co-variation relationship and rule of language use and social development by analyzing the core themes of the Chinese RWG By using corpus research methods, Di & Yang [20] analyze the application characteristics of high-frequency vocabulary, "we", and modal verbs in the English translation of RWG and draw a conclusion that these text features have built the Chinese government's image of down-to-earth, positive and promising. Thus, there is no doubt about it that the corpus-based studies are more scientific and objective.

## III. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is completed by following comprehensive research questions and systematic procedure.

### A. Research Questions

Translation is not only a cultural activity of exchanging information between languages, but also a complex series of thinking activities. Critical Discourse Analysis can provide a new perspective for the investigation of the multiple relationships among these subjects, and it can also enrich the discourse communication strategy of foreign translation to achieve the effect of foreign discourse communication. In this thesis, the main research questions are as follows:

(1) What are the linguistic features of the English translation of the RWG (2011&2022) in terms of high-frequency words, personal pronouns and modal verbs?

(2) What kind of Chinese government image does the English translation of the RWG create?

(3) How does the translation of Chinese political

discourse represented by RWG spread?

### B. Research Methodology

#### 1) Research methods

The research methods used in this thesis are as follows.

Corpus methods: the author analyzes the data of self-built corpora, including English translation of 2011&2022 RWG by using the functions of corpus toolkit. Specifically, the application of high-frequency words, will be examined to find the linguistic features of the English translation of RWG to reveal the implied Chinese government image.

Comparative analysis: the author compares the linguistic features at the lexical level between the English translation of 2011&2022 RWG，the purpose of which is to analyze the causes of differences and study the relationship between translation and ideology so as to explore the text effect of the English translation of RWG.

Exemplification: the author excerpts examples from the 2011&2022 English translation of RWG to demonstrate the different linguistic features.

#### 2) Data collection and corpus building

This thesis takes the English translation of 2011&2022 RWG as the basic corpus, so as to do translation studies at the lexical level by the quantitative analysis mechanism.

Data collection is the top priority of building corpus. As the important official document of central government, the data source of the RWG should be authoritative. So the data of the English translation of RWG selected from the official government websites, the website of the Central Compilation Bureau (http://en.theorychina.org.) and (https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents.)

When creating the corpus, 2011&2022 Government Work Report and 2011&2022 The State of the Union Address (SUA) were selected as the corpus, and two parallel corpora were created for comparison and analysis. The data showed that the total characters of the English translation of the government work report were 29016 and the total characters of SUA were 15078.

### IV. Text Effect Analysis of the Translation of the Report on the Work of the Government

In this section, based on CDA, the author explores the textual effect, namely, the image of the Chinese government, by analyzing the linguistic features of the English translation of 2011&2022 RWG and the 2011&2022 State of the Union Address (SUA) based on a self-built corpus, and elaborate on the main factors affecting the formation of the Chinese government's image.

### A. Corpus-Based Data Analysis

Research on high-frequency words and their collocation in the English translated texts can be used as an important research path for translation studies. Guided by CDA, the author analyzes the application of high-frequency words, including high-frequency nouns and high-frequency verbs, in the English translation of RWG on the basis of self-built corpus to study the Chinese government image shaped by the translation in this section.

By using AntConc, the author gets the word lists of RWG's English translation and SUA. After observing the first 20 high-frequency words, it is clear that the top five words used in RWG's English translation and SUA are "the", "and", "to", "of", and "we", which belong to function words. This phenomenon reflects that the English translation of RWG conforms to the idiomatic way of expressions in English. For this thesis, the function words including articles, prepositions, conjunctions and interjections with no explicit meaning are not the research focus. Therefore, as shown in Table II, the author separately extracts 20 high-frequency content words including nouns, verbs, pronouns, adjectives and adverbs from the two-word lists for this research. At the same time, in order to make the research more contrastive, the author also counts the number of occurrences per 10,000 words namely, the frequency (per 10,000 words).

From Table II, it can be seen that the 20 high-frequency content words in the translation of RWG consist of 6 nouns, six verbs, six adjectives and two personal pronouns. (In RWG, "work" is used more frequently as a noun. The author here describes it as a noun). The top 20 words in SUA consist of seven personal pronouns, seven verbs, two nouns, two adjectives and two adverb. Among the 40 high-frequency content words, nouns appear 11 times the same as verbs, followed by personal pronouns, 10 times. Generally speaking, high-frequency nouns are related to the speaking subject's concerns, and high-frequency verbs reflect the frequent actions taken by the speaker.

High-frequency terms can reflect the themes or concerns of the report. For example, the recurrence of the word "people" indicates that both governments are concerned about the people. Table II shows that the frequency of "people" in the English translation of RWG (per 10,000 words) is 5135.1, while it is only 4278.2 in SUA. Also, the content of the RWG is mainly about what the government has achieved or what the government has planned to do. These figures suggest that the English translation of RWG emphasizes the government's status as a political actor rather than a spokesperson compared to SUA. Unlike the SUA, the RWG's English translation often includes the words "development," "system," "economy," "work," and "rural". This indicates that the Chinese government is more concerned with practical issues such as development, economy, and reform than the U.S. government. In addition, the frequency of the word "development" in the English translation of the RNG has been in the top six from 2011 and 2022, further indicating that China attaches great importance to development. It is noteworthy that the word "development" appears 295 times, indicating that China's development has entered a period of hard work and the economic development has reached a critical stage of changing the development mode. The translation of key buzzwords and related discussions in the report has become an important channel for overseas media and readers to know about China.

TABLE II: TOP 20 HIGH-FREQUENCY CONTENT WORDS IN TWO CORPORA

| English Translation of RWG | | | SUA | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **High-frequency Content Words** | **Number of Occurrences** | **Frequency (per 10,000 words)** | **High-frequency Content Words** | **Number of Occurrences** | **Frequency (per 10,000 words)** |
| we | 870 | 29983.5 | we | 365 | 24207.5 |
| will | 738 | 25434.2 | our | 188 | 12468.5 |
| development | 295 | 10166.8 | i | 170 | 11274.7 |
| people | 149 | 5135.1 | it | 151 | 10014.6 |
| our | 145 | 4997.3 | is | 126 | 8356.5 |
| government | 131 | 4514.8 | you | 121 | 8024.9 |
| improve | 131 | 4514.8 | this | 98 | 6499.5 |
| more | 126 | 4342.4 | have | 97 | 6433.2 |
| all | 122 | 4204.6 | will | 95 | 6300.6 |
| new | 115 | 3963.3 | can | 84 | 5571.0 |
| system | 112 | 3859.9 | more | 83 | 5504.7 |
| economic | 107 | 3687.6 | be | 80 | 5305.7 |
| rural | 105 | 3618.7 | but | 80 | 5305.7 |
| work | 99 | 3411.9 | are | 77 | 5106.7 |
| be | 97 | 3343.0 | they | 77 | 5106.7 |
| year | 96 | 3308.5 | their | 76 | 5040.5 |
| areas | 94 | 3239.6 | America | 69 | 4576.2 |
| promote | 93 | 3205.1 | as | 68 | 4509.9 |
| reform | 90 | 3101.7 | form | 64 | 4244.6 |
| social | 87 | 2998.3 | people | 63 | 4278.2 |

## V. COMMUNICATION OF FOREIGN TRANSLATION AND CONSTRUCTION OF FOREIGN DISCOURSE SYSTEM

In this section, it analyzes the relationship between overseas-targeted publicity translation and the construction of foreign discourse system, explores the key elements of communication in the process of overseas-targeted publicity translation of political discourse, and proposes the applicability of critical analysis of the social practice dimension in the study of overseas-targeted publicity translation.

Some scholars point out that the Western discourse system is beginning to encounter challenges, and China has become the focus of the world's attention and is bound to play its role in the reconstruction of the discourse system in the period of international order transformation. In terms of the dissemination of discourse, foreign translation, especially the foreign translation of political discourse, differs significantly from ordinary translation in terms of dissemination channels and modes. As an important part of the construction of foreign discourse system, the foreign communication of foreign propaganda translation is mainly through official channels and supplemented by private channels. Domestic English media and foreign media reports become the main platforms for overseas audiences to understand the content of the government work report. Translators should pay attention to the fact that when foreign media report on the content of the government work report, they will mostly select the focus of the audience in the host country for interpretation, and rarely appear large quotations, but will pay extra attention to the key terms and expressions in specific fields, so the translation should consider the issue of communication effect while conveying the meaning.

This section examines the process of publicity translation from the perspective of CDA, which is inseparable from the characteristics of discourse production, dissemination and reception in the process of publicity translation. Fairclough's Critical Discourse Theory interprets discourse as a social practice, a "mode of behavior in social and historical contexts that is dialectically related to other dimensions of society" [21]. Lakoff states that "politics is language and language is politics" [22]. From this perspective, the publicity translation of political discourse involves both the translation of language and the dissemination of political ideas, and the translation process is showing the dialectical relationship between the two. As McNair points out, political communication is defined as "purposeful communication around politics" and "all political discourse is included in this definition" [23].

Fairclough proposes three steps in the CDA: Description, a linguistic description and analysis of the formal and structural features of the text [10]; Interpretation, an explanation of the relationship between the text and production, communication and consumption based on the results of the description of the text; Explanation, which further interprets the relationship between social practices and contexts, reveals the ideology embedded in the discourse. As shown in Fig. 1.
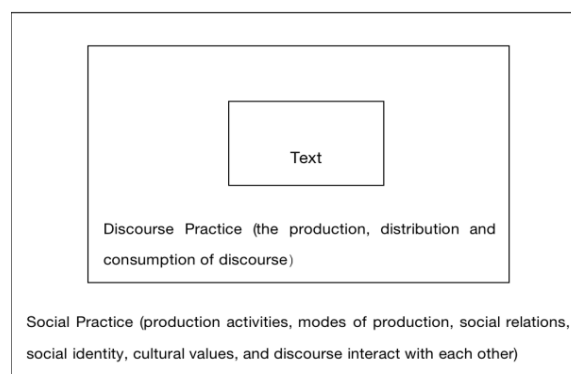


Fig. 1. Relationship between text and production, communication.

Combining the association between publicity translation and social practice, Tian [24] explored a new paradigm for the study of English translation of central documents from a supra-disciplinary perspective, arguing that English translation of central documents can draw concepts, ideas and frameworks from discourse studies, and this supra-disciplinary research perspective expands the horizon of publicity translation research and emphasizes the social practice character of translation. The translation of political documents, which is the main subject of this study, is essentially the foreign communication of political discourse, and it has clear social practice properties both from the perspective of cross-cultural communication and from the perspective of constructing a foreign discourse system, and it is not possible to simply figure out a fixed translation strategy from the language level because of the dynamic influence of international relations and ideological differences, but to broaden the research scope of translation studies.

## VI. CONCLUSION

Studying the English translation of the RWG is an authoritative way to communicate China's national situation and policies to the international community. It is of great importance for shaping the image of Chinese government. Realizing this importance, the authors of this paper study the English translations of the 2011&2022 RWG on the basis of a self-constructed corpus, analyzing the linguistic features of the English translations at the lexical level and exploring the textual effects of the Chinese government's image established by the English translations of the 2011&2022 RWG from the perspective of critical discourse analysis. According to the collected data, the English translations of RWG often use words related to "development", "reform" and "economy", which shows that the Chinese government takes reform and development as its main task, with a focus on economic construction and long-term efforts. These linguistic features have created an image of the Chinese government as authoritative, firm, responsible, confident and concerned about the development of the country.

By combing through the literature on foreign translation research, this study finds that there are more empirical summaries of foreign translation research, but less about the theoretical basis of research and the framework used, and more research that regards overseas-targeted translation as a static product, but less research that regards it as a dynamic process. Under the premise that China needs to improve its international discourse power and the international communication context is becoming increasingly mature, the construction of China's foreign discourse system and the foreign communication of China's voice have highlighted their importance.

The origin of this study, the argumentation process, and the exploration of the theoretical framework, in response to the research questions raised, are summarized as follows.

First, according to critical discourse analysis, discourse can reflect the social status of the subject and influence the fit of the subject's image. In addition, in choosing in translation strategies and methods, translators are influenced by the social status of the original text. Specifically, the fit of the Chinese government's image is closely related to the national conditions of China.

Secondly, the translation of the government work report should be based on the premise of faithfulness to the original text and accurate interpretation by the readers.

Thirdly, the translation and dissemination of Chinese political discourse represented by the government work report is a cross-cultural discourse practice through the encoding and construction of communication information by the original authors and translators. The main body of the discourse is conveyed to the communication object through the communication channel with the function of information loading, and finally realizes the communication effect. In the process of foreign translation and communication practice involves the environment, social coordination and cultural heritage three communication functions. At the same time, the translator must give full play to the role of gatekeeper, screening the information disseminated to ensure the accuracy of information dissemination.

## CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

## AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Yiran Chen conducted the research, analyzed the data and wrote this paper; Hongmei Ruan, professor at the School of Foreign Studies, Northwestern Polytechnical University and supervisor of Yiran Chen, has contributed a lot to writing and improving this paper; all authors had approved the final version.

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