

Presenting China's Image through the Translation of Comments: A case study of the WeChat subscription account of *Reference News*

Abstract: Facing the challenges and opportunities brought by the launch of the WeChat subscription account in 2012, *Reference News* (hereafter RN), a Chinese official news agency publishing selected translated foreign news, has responded quickly, becoming one of the most successful WeChat accounts. Among the various contents produced by RN's WeChat account, there is a type of news report that quotes social media comments posted by foreign netizens on China-related topics. This study investigates the translation of those comments. Using a dataset containing news articles quoting translated comments published between 1 August 2019 and 31 July 2020, we analysed the selection of news topics and comments and investigated the translated comments by drawing on appraisal theory (Martin & White, 2005) and framing strategies (Baker, 2006). It was found that RN tends to cover more soft news and quotes positive comments towards China. These selected comments were then rendered and reframed to play up the pro-China stance in the original and presented to the readers with screenshots of their source texts. In a highly marketized, digitalised, and competitive social media context, these strategies have facilitated RN's efforts to represent China's positive global image among foreign netizens to their WeChat account followers.

Keywords: translated comments, social media, WeChat, *Reference News*, appraisal, framing strategies

1. Introduction

WeChat, a multi-purpose messaging app with nearly 1.2 billion monthly active users, is one of the most popular social media applications in China. Since the launch of its first version in 2011, WeChat has gradually expanded into the global market, adding fun features like *drift bottle* and *moments* (Harwit, 2017). In 2012, the WeChat official account platform was launched, allowing thousands of companies, agencies, and organisations to create subscription accounts to provide various public content. Among those embracing the trend invoked by WeChat, *Reference News* (hereafter RN) is one of the most successful and influential accounts. *The 2018 Annual Report of the Top 1000 WeChat Accounts* (Gdata, 2018) put RN at the eighth position, ranking as the sixth most read account.

RN is known for publishing selected translated foreign news for Chinese readers. Many scholars have attempted to analyse the translated news produced by RN on its website and newspapers in aspects, such as critical discourse analysis, ethnographic studies (Pan, 2014a; Xia, 2019), and framing and reframing (Liu, 2017; Wu, 2018). However, little attention has been paid to translational practices on RN's social media platforms, such as its WeChat subscription account. News reports on RN's WeChat account that show foreigners' opinions on China-related topics often quote comments posted by netizens on foreign social media platforms, such as YouTube, Twitter, and Facebook. These comments are translated into Chinese and inserted into the news reports, which 'opens up a new scenario in news translation' (Hernández Guerrero, 2020, p. 380). This study intends to examine

such translations by investigating the selection of topics and comments in the news, the representations of the selected comments in terms of attitudinal resources (Martin & White, 2005) appraising China, and the visual demonstration of these renditions. Finally, it proposes possible ways of interpreting the emergence of these specially designed methods.

2. The Changing Landscape of Chinese Journalism

Since 1978, China's reform and opening-up policy has facilitated the commercialisation of Chinese media and the transformation of Chinese journalism. The government has encouraged the media to embrace a financially independent and market-driven model (Zhao, 2000). News agencies have received fewer state subsidies, becoming more dependent on subscriptions and advertising as their revenue sources (Wang & Sparks, 2019; Wang et al., 2018). Nevertheless, all media outlets remain subject to government supervision (Sparks et al., 2016). Under these circumstances, traditional national media agencies have confronted difficult challenges, needing to publish tailor-made content to attract the public and survive in the competitive market, while also having to align with 'the Party's propaganda guidelines, policies and tactics' (Li, 1998, p. 315).

The 21st century has witnessed the emergence and prosperity of the Internet and social media, further complicating the picture. According to *the 47th China Statistical Report on Internet Development* (CNNIC, 2021), over 0.74 billion netizens consume news online. Myriad choices other than state-owned media outlets are available to Chinese netizens for the most up-to-date information (Xin, 2018). Chinese official media urgently needs to embrace 'more popular form styles and forms' (Xin, 2018, p. 9), not only to gain greater popularity and influence, but also to fulfil their political task as a mouthpiece of the government. As Shao and Wang (2017) have observed, the most noticeable change in mainstream media is a shift from a mouthpiece model to a user-oriented one, which dethrones the status of the 'main theme' or formal language and employs a high proportion of 'words and sentences created by ordinary people' (Huang & Lu, 2017, pp. 781-782). These evolutionary change patterns can be observed on social media platforms of Chinese state-owned outlets, such as the *Xinhua News Agency* and CCTV, as indicated by Xin (2018) and Huang and Lu (2017) in their research. This study investigates whether similar features of popular journalism can be observed in the data collected from RN's WeChat account, given its state-owned identity and popular status on the WeChat public account platform.

3. Journalistic Translation in an Era of Social Media

The notion of translation has undergone significant changes over the past decades (Valdeón, 2018). Translation research is no longer language-centred, rather 'the theoretical discussion has expanded to investigate cultural, systemic, cognitive, ideological, and sociological aspects of translation and interpreting' (Schäffner, 2012, p. 867). In this study, translation in journalism is examined as a gatekeeping mechanism constituting two levels of analysis: the first being the selection of what is to be covered for the news at the macro level, and the second is the decision of what textual elements are to be included, deleted, or mediated in the published news at the micro level (Valdeón, 2020a). Moreover, journalistic platforms on social media tend to include more audio-visual materials, making news translation even more difficult (Davies & Conway, 2019). Thus, given 'an increasingly multimedia-oriented social media landscape' (Brandtzaeg et al., 2016, p. 338), it makes sense to include visual presentations in analysing news translation.

Journalistic translation has attracted much scholarly attention over the last 20 years. Although previous studies provide numerous accounts and evidence of mediations and shifts in news translation, the influence of flourishing social media platforms on news translation remains underexplored. Abudayeh and Dubbati (2020), within the scope of politeness strategies, have compared Arabic translations of inappropriate language in Trump's tweets by mainstream Arabic news agencies and found that presenting Trump as an offensive political leader has become the norm in Arabic society and for Arabic translators. Hernández Guerrero (2020), investigating the quoting and translation of tweets in a Spanish digital newspaper, argued that journalists prefer paraphrase to literal translation when rendering selected tweets with screenshots inserted, which function as credibility markers and complementary visual elements. However, both studies only used a small amount of data, and their findings may be only applicable in Arabic and Spanish contexts, meaning that further attempts should be made based on larger datasets regarding different social contexts, such as the Chinese one.

4. Reference News as a Translating Institution

Founded on 7 November 1931, in Ruijin, Jiangxi Province, RN used to be an internal publication only available to senior party leaders. RN distinguishes itself from other Chinese newspapers as it mainly served as 'the party's eyes and ears by providing an unfiltered education for party members of a particular ranking and above about views and events occurring outside of China' (Chase, 2018, p. 142). It was not until the 1950s that this newspaper gradually became available to a broader readership in China. After several decades of reform and development, RN successfully transformed itself from a secretive publication to a household newspaper with the largest circulation in China. The marketisation and digitalisation of the Chinese media have prompted RN to expand its territories into new media with its website, Weibo account platform, and mobile application (Xia & Wang, 2015). Nevertheless, as an official newspaper sponsored by the *Xinhua News Agency*, RN still has the responsibility to promote mainstream narratives and ideologies (Xia, 2020).

Pan (2014b, 2017) analysed translated news discourse by RN and claimed that stance mediations are inevitable in a state-owned news agency, such as RN, especially when sensitive news discourse is translated. Wu (2018) examined translated news on the China-Japan dispute over Diaoyu Island and concluded that stances were often reframed in RN translations in a pro-China direction. Zeng (2020) compared the news translation practice between RN and a news agency based in Chinese Taiwan regarding the translation of news relating to the US-China trade dispute and found that RN tended to strengthen the pro-China stance in its Chinese renditions. However, these studies have overlooked an essential aspect of journalistic translation, the translation at macro level, that 'functions as filter to allow news writers/translators and companies to consider what should be published and what should not' (Valdeón, 2020b, p. 2). Furthermore, current journalistic RN translation research focuses mainly on translated news on its website and in printed newspapers, with investigations into the news published on RN's WeChat subscription account rarely seen. New media platforms, such as RN's WeChat official account, deserve more scholarly attention, given their unique features and patterns.

5. Methodology

5.1 Data

All content published by RN between 1 August 2019 and 31 July 2020 on its WeChat subscription account were collected, providing a dataset of 10,064 articles. Keyword title searches for ‘外国网友, 国外网友(foreign netizens)’ and ‘海外网友(overseas netizens)’ located 108 articles. Both the source and target texts of all comments quoted in the articles were recorded. In this study, most attention has been given to comments translated from English to Chinese; therefore, comments in other languages were not collected in the comment dataset. Translated comments without clear traces of their source texts were not included in the textual analysis phase, given the difficulty of finding the corresponding sources. In this way, a dataset of 415 pairs of English comments and their translated Chinese counterparts was built, containing 5,278 English and 5,239 Chinese words.

5.2 Analytical Framework

Bass (1969) proposed a double-action internal news flow model in which news gathering and news processing, ‘two functionally separate units’ (p. 72), make up the news production process (see Figure 1). This model is similar to the mechanism of news translation in journalism seen by Valdeón (2020a) as a two-level practice consisting of the selection of news to be covered at the macro level and the textual elements to be included or deleted in the published news at the micro level. The analytical framework below (see Figure 2) was designed for this model.

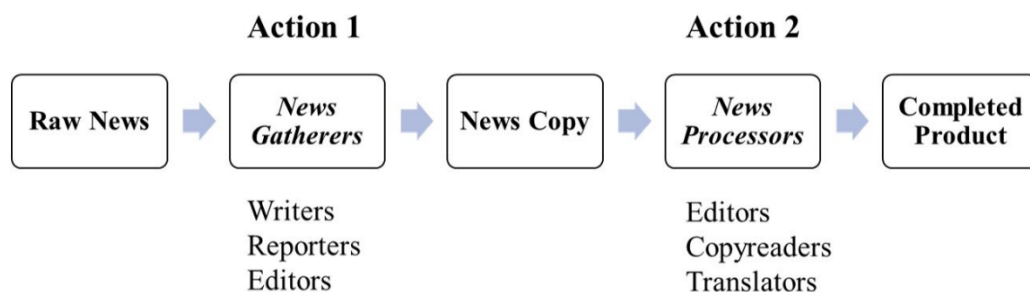


Figure 1. Double-action internal news flow adapted from Bass (Bass, 1969, p. 72)

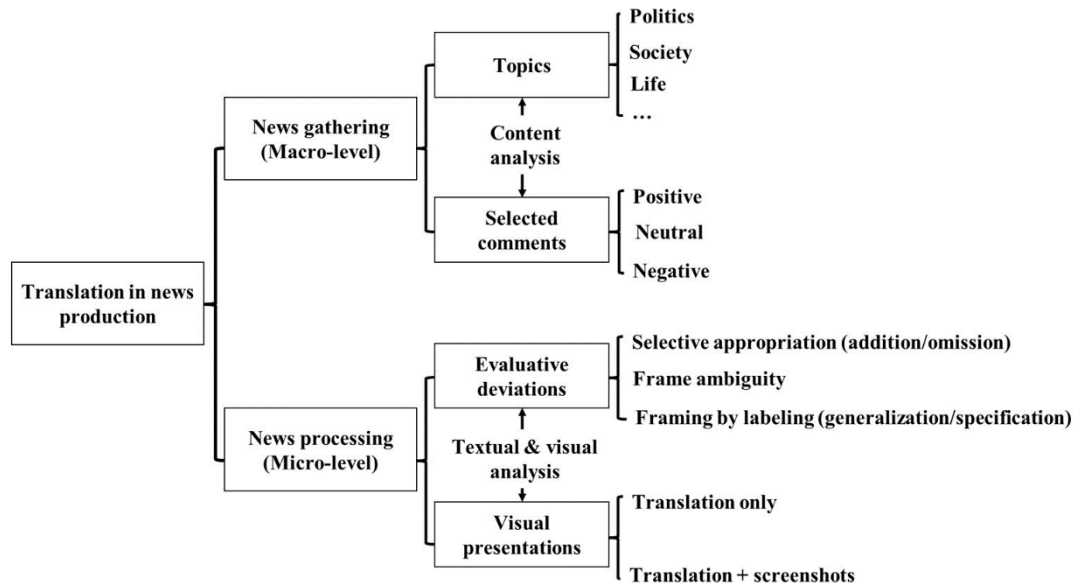


Figure 2. The analytical framework

The macro-level analysis consists of content analyses of news topics and selected comments. The investigation of themes covered in the data was based on the reading of news titles and news articles. After all the stories were thoroughly analysed, seven main topic categories were identified: international, COVID-19, events, politics, China's development, life in China, and Chinese culture. The 108 collected reports were categorised under seven major headings, each with several subtopics. Content analysis classified all 415 comments as positive, negative, or neutral. The selected comments were diverse, commenting on various topics relevant to China and the Chinese people narrated in the news. To facilitate the smooth running of the coding process, standards were set for categorising comments as follows: comments with a pro-China stance towards the issue covered or speaking highly of the Chinese news actors involved were coded as positive, those with an anti-China attitude or suspicious of the Chinese achievements were marked as negative, and those without any prominent attitude were marked as neutral. The micro-level analysis investigated evaluative deviations and visual presentations of the translated comments, focusing on whether attitudinal variations could be detected and how the translations were visually presented to the target readers.

In examining attitudinal deviations, the appraisal theory (Martin & White, 2005) and framing strategies (Baker, 2006) were used to facilitate the analysis. Based on the systemic functional linguistics (SFL), the appraisal theory uses three sectors of evaluative resources, attitude, graduation, and engagement, to interpret interpersonal meaning (Martin & White, 2005). Attitude is relevant to the expression of feelings, graduation deals with the scaling of feelings, and engagement is concerned with 'sourcing attitudes and the play of voices around opinions in discourse' (Martin & White, 2005, p. 35). This well-structured appraisal system 'makes possible nuanced explanations of the particular evaluative workings of individual texts and, similarly, nuanced accounts of how texts are similar or different according to their particular evaluative arrangements' (White, 2015, p. 6). This study focused on analysing attitudinal resources evaluating China. Attitude consists of affect, judgement, and appreciation, referring to emotional reactions, evaluation of behaviours, and appraisal of objects, respectively (White, 2015). Resources conveying emotions are categorised

under affect. Judgement attends to how behaviours are gauged regarding ‘various normative principles’ (Martin & White, 2005, p. 35), while appreciation considers how objects are valued or assessed. These three semantic regions of attitude offer systematic indicators to locate ‘specific lexical and grammatical choices’ (Munday, 2018, p. 181) employed in constructing China’s image in the English comments and their Chinese counterparts collected in our data.

Aided by the appraisal theory, all attitudinal resources evaluating China in both the source and target texts could be traced. However, there is a need for a dichotomy in recognising and categorising attitudinal deviations, for which the narrative approach introduced by Baker (2006, 2007) is useful. From the perspective of narrative theory, Baker (2014) argues that instead of faithfully representing a story in another language, translation actually (re)narrates and constructs it in a new context. In other words, translation participates in shaping social reality. Baker (2006) also proposed several framing strategies that translators and interpreters can exploit when ‘accentuating, undermining or modifying aspects of the narrative(s) encoded in the source text or utterance’ (p. 105), namely, frame ambiguity, temporal and spatial framing, selective appropriation, framing by labelling, and repositioning of participants. Frame ambiguity refers to presenting a reformulated version of the same event to legitimise another narrative. Temporal and spatial framing concerns the shift from the original temporal and spatial context to one that better foregrounds the narrative. Selective appropriation is the addition or omission of textual materials to reframe a narrative into the expected version. Framing by labelling focuses on employing ‘a lexical item, term or phrase to identify a person, place, group, event or any other key elements in a narrative’ (p. 122). Repositioning of participants attends to the participants’ emplacement and their relationship with the narrative in which they are situated. These devices serve as useful toolkits for researchers to identify subtle choices by translators and interpreters that significantly influence people’s perception of objects or events. Since shifts at the textual level remain the foci of this analysis, frame ambiguity, selective appropriation, and framing by labelling are most relevant to this study. Combined with appraisal theory, these framing strategies enable us to recognise the strategies adopted by RN in reframing the collected comments.

In this study, the visual presentations of translated comments were also examined, as most translated comments were accompanied by a screenshot of their original English comments in the data. This phenomenon is also worth investigating given the visibility of translation it incurs and the multimodal features of new media, as mentioned in Section 3.

The first step in finding evaluative deviations was to analyse both the source text and target text regarding attitudinal resources assessing China, thus obtaining the frequency of affect, judgement, and appreciation resources. These attitudinal realisations were compared between the English comments and their English renditions in a detailed manner to locate any evaluative deviations that could be further categorised under selective appropriation (addition/omission), framing by labelling (specification/generalisation), and frame ambiguity. Furthermore, the stance shift for each deviation was coded and marked. The examination of the translated comments’ visual presentations was relatively simple, looking at whether a translation was provided alone or accompanied with screenshots of their sources. As a result of the above analytical procedure, quantitative and qualitative results were generated and exported for further interpretation.

6. Translating Comments for *Reference News*

This section contributes to interpreting the data engendered from the above analysis. The first part

regarding macro-level translation looks at the news topic and comment selection. The micro-level translation is concerned with the distribution and deviation of attitudinal resources evaluating China and the visual presentations of the translated comments. Furthermore, examples with literal translations (hereafter LT) are also included for clarification.

6.1 News Gathering: Selecting Topics and Comments

6.1.1 Topic Selection

The topics covered in the 108 news reports were diverse, ranging from Chinese culture, China's development, and life in China to COVID-19 and politics, as shown in Figure 3. The three most prominent topics were China's development, life in China, and Chinese culture. Under the general heading of China's development, more specific subtopics were further identified, including Chinese science and technology (22), China's infrastructure (6), gender equality in China (2), and the discovery of natural energy resources in China (1). Subtopics regarding Chinese people's stories (34), Chinese cities (1), and the double 11 shopping festival (1) account for the coverage of life in China. In the news reports examined, topics of hard news^① (e.g. politics and the current COVID-19 pandemic) were less frequent; instead, soft elements were often highlighted, especially news of ordinary Chinese people, China's scientific and technological developments, and Chinese culture. Examples 1, 2, and 3 are typical headlines of the reports covering Chinese people's stories, China's science and technology, and Chinese culture, respectively.

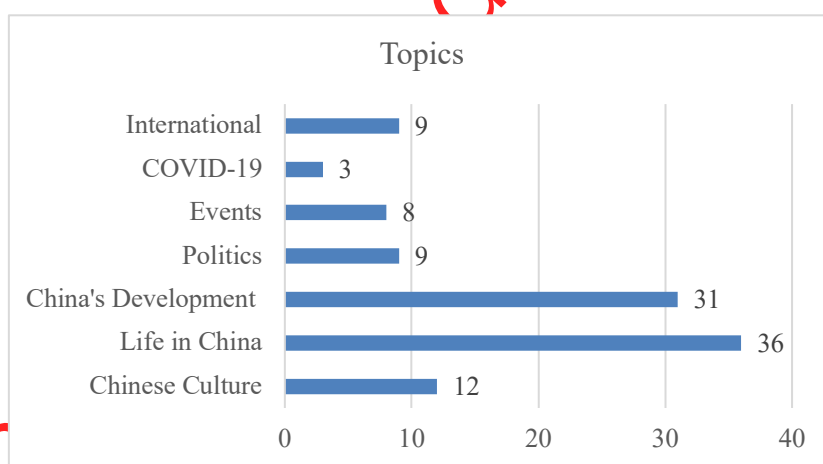


Figure 3. Topics covered in the RN news reports

Example 1

中国的哥赤脚追车救人 外国网友齐声大赞：“真英雄”

LT: Chinese taxi drivers chasing cars barefoot to save people: Foreign netizens unanimously praise him as ‘a true hero’

Example 2

看到这些“黑科技” 海外网友：中国今年的春运可太酷了！

LT: Seeing these ‘black technology’, overseas netizens: China's Spring Festival transportation this year is so cool!

Example 3

中国麻将“攻占”美国？海外网友在线求助：谁能教教我！

LT: Chinese Mahjong ‘invades’ the United States? Overseas netizens seek help online: who can teach me!

As van Doorslaer (2010, p. 185) has noted, both selection and de-selection are crucial in ‘setting images, or creating circumstances that encourage the development of images’. It is significant that the time range for data collection from 1 August 2019 to 31 July 2020 saw many events in China, such as the ongoing US-China trade dispute, the 70th founding anniversary of PRC, and the COVID-19 pandemic, all of which made the headlines of the daily news. However, these topics are not frequently observed in the dataset. Only three entries concerning China-US relations, including one about the trade spat, were pinpointed under the heading of politics. Three reports on the 70th anniversary of the PRC came under the general topic of events, and three stories about COVID-19 were found. Compared with soft news topics regarding culture, people, and scientific development in China, hard news was rarely seen in news reports quoting foreign netizens’ comments as sources.

6.1.2 Comment Selection

Figure 4 presents an overview of the selected comments’ stance. Nearly all the comments chosen for translation took a positive stance towards China or China-related topics, accounting for 96 % of the data. While the selected comments have prompted news consumers to listen to how overseas netizens portray China on foreign social media, the scope remains somewhat limited given the selection and filtering process at a macro level, which could lead to ‘certain gaps or distortions’ (Conway & Vaskivska, 2010, p. 251).

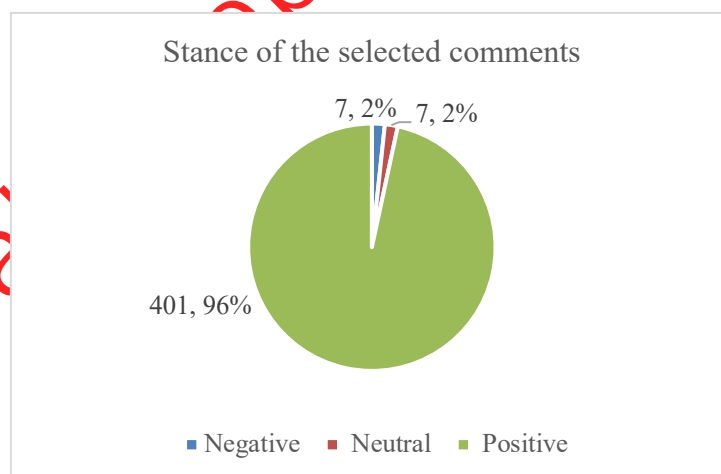


Figure 4. Stance of the selected comments

6.2 News Processing: Presentations of the Selected Comments

6.2.1 Attitudinal Deviations

Table 1 demonstrates the distribution of attitudinal resources that evaluate China in the collected English comments and their Chinese renditions. In rendering less sensitive discourse, such as

comments from social media, attitudinal deviations can still be discerned. However, rather than reframing narratives into severely mediated ones, the 57 deviations found further enhance the pro-China stance initially stated in the source texts, as shown in Figure 5. In the following section, examples are given elaborating how each framing strategy works in translating foreign netizens' positive comments into even more affirmative statements about China.

Attitudinal resources	Source Text		Target Text	
	Negative	Positive	Negative	Positive
Affect	0	32	0	26
Judgment	2	75	1	74
Appreciation	3	61	1	63

Table 1. Distribution of attitudinal resources in ST and TT

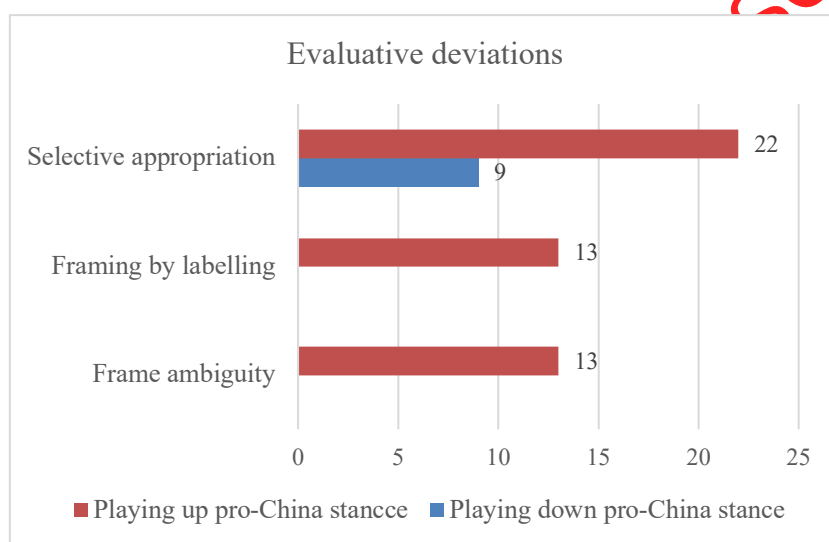


Figure 5. Attitudinal deviations

Frame Ambiguity: Promoting a Finer Pro-China Narrative

The investigation identified 13 deviations of frame ambiguity. The principal function of frame ambiguity is to recreate a narrative that favours the self (Baker, 2006). In this case, the self is China and Chinese people. Thus, all instances of frame ambiguity contributed to a more satisfactory Chinese narrative, telling Chinese readers that foreigners respect and positively praise China, as shown in examples 4 and 5. In example 4, the original positive stance of this judgement source was further strengthened by reframing 'work hard' into 'exert themselves'. In example 5, the original comments adopted 'undeniably formidable' to depict China, an appreciation device inscribed with nuanced negative implications; thus the Chinese rendition resorted to a positive phrase of 'has shown strong powers'.

Example 4

ST: *Chinese people work hard*, that is why China has accomplished so many things in the last 30 years.

TT: 中国人工作很拼，这就是为什么中国在过去 30 年内取得这么多成就。

LT: *Chinese always exert themselves*, which is why China has achieved so much in the past 30 years.

Example 5

ST: with self-developed new technologies, new equipment, new materials, *China is undeniably formidable* in every aspect of human development, yet friendly to the world. the very best!

TT: 凭借自主研发的新技术、新设备、新材料, 中国在人类发展的各方面都展现出强大的实力, 而且这个国家对世界友好, 真是太棒了。

LT: With new technologies, new equipment and new materials independently developed, *China has shown strong powers* in all aspects of human development. Moreover, it is wonderful that this country is friendly to the world.

Framing by Labelling: Relabelling China as a Rising and United Country

Framing by labelling is concerned with switching lexical items to identify certain places, characters, or objects (Baker, 2006). According to Qin and Zhang (2018), this strategy can be further categorised into two types: specification and generalisation. In the analysis, both categories were identified in relabelling China, Chinese people, the Chinese government, and other China-related elements in eight instances of specification and five of generalisation. The act of relabelling depicted an image of a rising and united China.

Concerning specification, China-related elements in the ST were further elaborated and clarified in a strengthened pro-China stance, as shown in examples 6 and 7. In example 6, the label of 'infrastructure superpower' was reproduced as 'infrastructure maniac superpower', underlying an even stronger pro-China stance in emphasising China's advanced infrastructure construction ability. In example 7, 'China' in the original statement was specified as 'China's development', subtly weakening China's aggressive image and facilitating the frame of China's incessant progress.

Example 6

ST: China is *an infrastructure superpower*.

TT: 中国真是“基建狂魔”超级大国。

LT: China is really *an "infrastructure maniac" superpower*.

Example 7

ST: *China* is unstoppable.

TT: 中国的发展无法阻挡。

LT: *China's development* is unstoppable.

In terms of generalisation, the data were concerned with transferring Chinese people, the Chinese government, or Chinese cities into 'China', underlining a sense of solidarity. Examples 8 and 9 reframed either 'Chinese government' or 'Chinese people' into 'China', praising China as a whole, which strengthened the positive stance towards China and emphasised the collective and inseparable nature of the Chinese nation.

Example 8

ST: Only *China gov* is efficient enough to get big projects rolling

TT: 只有**中国**才能有效地推动大项目的推进。
LT: Only **China** can effectively promote big projects.

Example 9

ST: About a month ago Geshida Selena cruise ship docked in Tianjin, China. **Chinese** spent only 18 hours evacuating all the passengers with medical support and everything.

TT: 大约一个月前, "歌诗达赛琳娜"号停靠中国天津。**中国**仅仅用了 18 个小时就将所有乘客撤离并提供了医疗支持和一切

LT: About a month ago, the "Geshida Selena" docked in Tianjin, China. It took only 18 hours for **China** to evacuate all passengers and provide medical support and everything.

Selective Appropriation: Filtering and Retouching China's Global Image

Selective appropriation refers to the addition or omission of textual materials. Our analysis shows that framing strategy is used most frequently. Mostly, selective appropriation delineated China's exceptional global image by adding or omitting certain evaluative elements, but occasionally also reduced the number of praises to maintain modesty and objectivity.

In terms of addition, among the 18 instances of deviations, inserting appreciation (5) and judgement sources (7) were frequently noted, followed by the addition of graduation resources (6) to further strengthen the pro-China stance. In example 10, three appreciation devices appraising China were added to the Chinese rendition, delineating China's friendly and kind image. Example 11 is a typical instance of inserting judgement sources in the translated text to highlight China's efforts and strengthen the pro-China stance. Inserting graduation elements was also an identified strategy, shown in example 12, with 'so many' increasing the force of 'great talents', thus presenting a stronger pro-China stance.

Example 10

ST: This is real China opposite to the west portraying profiling the Chinese

TT: 这才是真正的中国, **和平、文明、友爱**, 与一些西方媒体描述的不一样。

LT: This is the real China, **peaceful, civilized and friendly**. It's different from what some western media has described.

Example 11

ST: China has been trying to help the developing countries environmental wise

TT: 中国一直在环境保护方面**努力**帮助其他国家。

LT: China has been **working very hard** to help other countries in environmental protection.

Example 12

ST: How come China has great talents?

TT: 为什么中国有**这么多**优秀的人才?

LT: Why are there **so many** excellent talents in China?

Omission (13) occurred both in playing up and down the pro-China stance, with the former deleting negative attitudinal resources about China (3) and the latter positive ones (10) in being more modest or objective. In example 13, 'a developing nation', a less favourable lexical device of appreciation

related to China, was omitted in the translation emphasising China's tremendous achievements in science and technology. In example 14, instead of referring to China's behaviour as the best, the Chinese rendition switched to 'one thing', a neutral phrase to lightly weaken the pro-China stance. Omission was also used to reproduce statements with fewer affect resources. As shown in example 15, the deletion of 'I love', a typical realisation of positive affect, led to a more objective but positive comment on China's push for technological development.

Example 13

ST: with lesser noise, more efficient, another great innovative product. China is forever *a developing nation*, for the betterment of the whole population.

TT: 又一个了不起的创新, 更低的噪音, 更加高效节能, 中国总是在造福人类。

LT: Another great innovation, lower noise, more efficient energy saving, China is always benefiting mankind.

Example 14

ST: China keeps doing *what's best*: build for the future generations

TT: 中国总在坚持做一件: 那就是为子孙后代打造未来。

LT: China has kept doing one thing: to build a future for future generations.

Example 15

ST: *I love* how China is always pushing new technology and tools to make life easier!

TT: 中国一直在推动新技术和工具, 让生活更便捷。

LT: China has been promoting new technologies and tools to make life easier.

It can be posited that under each framing strategy, the direction of evaluative deviations tended to move from an already pro-China stance to a more positive and strengthened stance. These deviations worked together to arouse nationalism and patriotism among Chinese readers by promoting a refined pro-China narrative, relabelling China as a rising and united country, and retouching China's image by adding and omitting specific evaluative resources.

6.2.2 Visual Presentations

This section examines how translated comments were presented to Chinese readers in the final published news reports. As shown in Figure 6, screenshots of the original texts are often provided in news reports, with only two exceptions in the 108 news reports sampled. According to Bielsa and Bassnett (2008, p. 73), the invisibility of translation in the news is partly due to 'the fact that translation has been successfully integrated within journalism'. By demonstrating the sources to the readers, translation is brought to the fore and given higher visibility. Furthermore, the news appears to be more trustworthy with ST screenshots as credibility indicators. In this way, RN convinces the target readers that they offer credible information and acknowledge the translation practice.



Figure 6. The quoted comments from a RN's WeChat article
(Retrieved from RN's WeChat subscription account
WeChat ID: jkxxwx
<https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/vjst5h6caAMd9QorCpiBbw>)

7. Discussion

A general analysis of both macro and micro levels of translation regarding the Chinese rendition of English comments by RN's WeChat account reveals several riveting strategies RN uses in the competitive WeChat account 'battlefield'. In news gathering, RN tends to choose the coverage of soft news themes and positive comments about China in news reports quoting foreign netizens' comments. Attitudinal deviations discerned mainly strengthened the pro-China stance in the selected comments. The co-existence of translated comments and their source texts' screenshots also implies higher visibility and credibility of the translations. The pooled effects of these acts provide representations of China's positive global image. This section discusses some possible factors that may have motivated these strategies.

7.1 New Platform, Novel Strategies

In a new social media context, RN has developed a series of strategies to survive and succeed in the 'battlefield' of the WeChat official account platform. The articles investigated in this study belong to a unique category of news reports on RN's WeChat account, combining social media references,

such as foreign netizens' comments with China-related soft or hard news to portray China's image to the target Chinese readers. We tried to find similar news on the RN's official website during the same time frame of 1 August 2019 to 31 July 2020. However, only two entries whose titles contain 'foreign or overseas netizens' were available on the RN's website. Obviously, these special news reports published on RN's WeChat account are prepared exclusively for its followers.

Moving news from newspapers and websites to social media is to not merely duplicate the same content to a new platform; rather, 'the properties, characteristics, and routines of the various platforms or their media logic must also be taken into account' (Welbers & Opgenhaffen, 2019, p. 89). As Tu (2016, p. 346) has noted, Chinese official institutions and media agencies, such as *People's Daily*, strive for greater impact and a louder voice on the Internet by posting content with 'an unofficial tone in a way that is intimate and vivid to netizens'. RN has resorted to similar popular journalism techniques, such as publishing creative news reports incorporating information and social media comments and selecting less mainstream and formal news, as found in this study. Furthermore, a generic term of 'foreign netizens' in each report's headline brings the existence of social media references to the fore, as can be seen in examples 1, 2, and 3. In a study on quoting from social media in journalism in the Czech Republic, Hladík and Štětka (2017) found that social media references are more frequently used in soft rather than hard news, a finding which coincides with our own. Using creative and soft journalistic content, RN's WeChat account has earned itself a well-liked position.

7.2 The Responsibility of an Official News Agency

As an official media institution, RN shoulders the responsibility of presenting China's positive image and promoting mainstream narratives and ideologies through translated news (Xia, 2020, p. 190). Previous studies on RN's news translation practices have indicated that their Chinese renditions of foreign news tend to strengthen the pro-China stance and frame China positively, given its identity as an official mouthpiece (Pan, 2015; Wu, 2018; Zeng, 2020). This pattern was also noted in the selection and translation of the comments in this study. In the Chinese context, news agencies are pivotal in promoting nationalism by shaping the nation's image through certain narratives (Zeng & Sparks, 2020). With the coverage of positive China-related stories and foreign netizens' comments, RN actively participates in embedding the global image of a rising China in the news content, thus strengthening national pride among Chinese readers. This kind of top-down state-led nationalism, on the one hand, 'can be a source of popular support for the regime as people take pride in the country's achievements' (Woods & Dickson, 2017, p. 170); on the other hand, it may cultivate a negative or superior attitude towards other countries (Woods & Dickson, 2017). While how RN has attempted to strike a balance between these two forms of nationalism is beyond the scope of this research, as a state-owned agency RN has successfully fulfilled the task of aligning with the government and promoting patriotism and nationalism by covering positive content and strengthening the pro-China stance in the Chinese renditions of the selected comments.

7.3 Young and Highly Educated Readers

Target readers have been empowered to influence the editorial agenda of the press on new media

platforms by expressing their preferences and thoughts using interactive functions, such as the like and share button (Morlandstø & Mathisen, 2017). Therefore, the audience's needs and preferences must be considered if an outlet wants to succeed in the battlefield of social media. RN's WeChat subscription account faces the same challenge. According to an article published on RN's WeChat, (Cankaoxiaoxi, 2019, October 20), the account is followed by many young readers from teenagers to young adults, distributed across the wealthiest Chinese provinces and cities, including Guangdong, Jiangsu, Zhejiang, Shandong, Beijing, and Henan provinces. To become more influential and popular among these younger readers, RN has resorted to various methods. In a lecture organised by Shantou University (Jiang & Liang, 2020), Zhao Xinbing, the deputy chief editor of RN, mentions that RN has set up a custom-made team for new media platforms and uses eye-catching titles and multimodal materials to cater to younger readers. In addition, as target readers have become highly educated and capable of accessing the original texts of translations, they may detect the transformations imposed by news agencies (Pan & Liao, 2020). To address this problem, RN inserts screenshots of the original comments selected for rendition to increase credibility, as noted in our analysis. To ingratiate itself with young and highly educated readers on social media, RN publishes diverse and interesting content, such as the news reports examined in this study, and adds credibility markers, such as screenshots of selected comments.

8. Conclusion

This study investigated translated comments in news reports containing foreign social media references published on RN's WeChat account by analysing macro and micro levels of translation practice. To tackle the challenges and seize the chances of a marketized and digitalised media environment, RN has made strategic moves to find a position in the competitive WeChat account 'battlefield'. It publishes innovative journalistic content covering foreign social media references and China-related soft news and provides screenshots for credibility and translation markers to attract more and younger followers. Simultaneously, RN has successfully fulfilled its political task as a state-owned agency to promote mainstream ideologies by selecting positive comments from overseas netizens and mediating these comments towards an even more pro-China stance. Aided by these creative strategies, RN strikes a balance between 'market logic' and 'political logic' (Li, 1998, p. 315). This type of 'popular journalism with Chinese characteristics' (Li, 1998, p. 307) has facilitated RN's success on the WeChat public account platform.

Notes:

1. No academic consensus has been reached in defining soft and hard news (Reinemann et al., 2012). In this study, the definitions proposed by Patterson (2000) were adopted to interpret the findings from the content analysis of the news coverage. Hard news refers to major breaking events concerned with 'top leaders, major issues, or significant disruptions in the routines of daily life' (p. 3) that should be reported in an urgent manner, such as the current COVID-19 pandemic. Soft news is 'typically more sensational, more personality-centred, less timebound, more practical, and more incident-based than other news' (p. 4), such as news stories about

ordinary Chinese people or Chinese culture in the research.

References

- Abudayeh, H., & Dubbati, B. (2020). Politeness strategies in translating Donald Trump's offensive language into Arabic. *Perspectives*, 28(3), 424-439. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0907676X.2019.1709514>
- Baker, M. (2006). *Translation and conflict: A narrative account*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203099919>
- Baker, M. (2007). Reframing conflict in translation. *Social Semiotics*, 17(2), 151-169. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10350330701311454>
- Baker, M. (2014). Translation as re-narration. In J. House (Ed.), *Translation: A multidisciplinary approach* (pp. 158-177). Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137025487_9
- Bass, A. Z. (1969). Refining the “gatekeeper” concept: A UN radio case study. *Journalism Quarterly*, 46(1), 69-72. <https://doi.org/10.1177/107769906904600110>
- Bielsa, E., & Bassnett, S. (2008). *Translation in global news*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203890011>
- Brandtzaeg, P. B., Lüders, M., Spangenberg, J., Rath-Wiggins, L., & Følstad, A. (2016). Emerging journalistic verification practices concerning social media. *Journalism Practice*, 10(3), 323-342. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17512786.2015.1020331>
- Cankaoxiaoxi. (2019, October 20). Reference News WeChat official account hit 3 million followers. *Reference News*. <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/CrODshlv27xNWkLqVctCIg>
- Chase, T. (2018). Translating the news in China: The evolution of Reference News and its future in a digital news landscape. *Media International Australia*, 168(1), 140-152. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1329878X18768076>
- CNNIC. (2021). *The 47th China statistical report on Internet development*. <https://www.cnnic.com.cn/IDR/ReportDownloads/202104/P020210420557302172744.pdf>
- Conway, K., & Vaskivska, T. (2010). Consuming news translation: The New York Times online and the “Kremlin rules” experiment. *Across Languages and Cultures*, 11(2), 233-253. <https://doi.org/10.1556/Acr.11.2010.2.6>
- Davier, L., & Conway, K. (2019). Introduction: Journalism and translation in the era of convergence. In L. Davier & K. Conway (Eds.), *Journalism and translation in the era of convergence* (Vol. 146, pp. 1-11). John Benjamins Publishing Company. <https://doi.org/10.1075/btl.146.00dav>
- Gsdata. (2018). *The 2018 annual report of the top 1000 WeChat accounts*. https://www.sohu.com/a/288255039_114751
- Harwit, E. (2017). WeChat: social and political development of China’s dominant messaging app. *Chinese Journal of Communication*, 10(3), 312-327. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17544750.2016.1213757>
- Hernández Guerrero, M. J. (2020). The translation of tweets in Spanish digital newspapers. *Perspectives*, 28(3), 376-392. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0907676X.2019.1609535>
- Hladík, R., & Štětka, V. (2017). The powers that tweet: Social media as news sources in the Czech Republic. *Journalism Studies*, 18(2), 154-174. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2015.1046995>
- Huang, L., & Lu, W. (2017). Functions and roles of social media in media transformation in China: A

-
- case study of “@ CCTV NEWS”. *Telematics and Informatics*, 34(3), 774-785.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tele.2016.05.015>
- Jiang, W., & Liang, S. (2020). *Reference News in new media*. <http://media.stu.edu.cn/archives/21869>
- Li, Z. (1998). Popular journalism with Chinese characteristics: From revolutionary modernity to popular modernity. *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, 1(3), 307-328.
<https://doi.org/10.1177%2F136787799800100301>
- Liu, N. X. (2017). Same perspective, different effect: Framing the economy through financial news translation. *Perspectives*, 25(3), 452-463. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0907676X.2017.1287203>
- Martin, J. R., & White, P. R. R. (2005). *The language of evaluation: Appraisal in English*. Palgrave Macmillan. <https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230511910>
- Morlandstø, L., & Mathisen, B. R. (2017). Participation and control: The interactions between editorial staff, technology and users in online commentary journalism. *Digital Journalism*, 5(6), 791-808.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/21670811.2016.1195133>
- Munday, J. (2018). A model of appraisal: Spanish interpretations of President Trump's inaugural address 2017. *Perspectives*, 26(2), 180-195. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0907676X.2017.1388415>
- Pan, L. (2014a). Investigating institutional practice in news translation: An empirical study of a Chinese agency translating discourse on China. *Perspectives*, 22(4), 547-565.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/0907676X.2014.948888>
- Pan, L. (2014b). Mediation in news translation: A critical analytical framework. In D. Abend-David (Ed.), *Media and translation: An interdisciplinary approach* (pp. 247-266). Bloomsbury.
<https://doi.org/10.5040/9781501300196.ch-011>
- Pan, L. (2015). Ideological positioning in news translation: A case study of evaluative resources in reports on China. *Target. International Journal of Translation Studies*, 27(2), 215-237.
<https://doi.org/10.1075/target.27.2.03pan>
- Pan, L. (2017). Representing the Tibet conflict in the Chinese translation of western news reports. In M. Albakry (Ed.), *Translation and the intersection of texts, contexts and politics* (pp. 201-222). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-53748-1_10
- Pan, L., & Liao, S. (2020). News translation of reported conflicts: A corpus-based account of positioning. *Perspectives*, 1-18. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0907676X.2020.1792519>
- Patterson, T. E. (2000). Doing well and doing good: How soft news and critical journalism are shrinking the news audience and weakening democracy—and what news outlets can do about it. *Faculty Research Working Papers Series, John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University*.
<https://research.hks.harvard.edu/publications/getFile.aspx?Id=1>
- Qin, B., & Zhang, M. (2018). Reframing translated news for target readers: A narrative account of news translation in Snowden's discourses. *Perspectives*, 26(2), 261-276.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/0907676x.2017.1377265>
- Reinemann, C., Stanyer, J., Scherr, S., & Legnante, G. (2012). Hard and soft news: A review of concepts, operationalizations and key findings. *Journalism*, 13(2), 221-239.
<https://doi.org/10.1177%2F1464884911427803>
- Schäffner, C. (2012). Rethinking transediting. *Meta: journal des traducteurs/Meta: Translators' Journal*, 57(4), 866-883. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1021222ar>
- Shao, P., & Wang, Y. (2017). How does social media change Chinese political culture? The formation of fragmentized public sphere. *Telematics and Informatics*, 34(3), 694-704.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tele.2016.05.018>

- Sparks, C., Wang, H., Huang, Y., Zhao, Y., Lü, N., & Wang, D. (2016). The impact of digital media on newspapers: Comparing responses in China and the United States. *Global Media and China*, 1(3), 186-207. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2059436416666385>
- Tu, F. (2016). WeChat and civil society in China. *Communication and the Public*, 1(3), 343-350. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2057047316667518>
- Valdeón, R. A. (2018). On the use of the term 'translation' in journalism studies. *Journalism*, 19(2), 252-269. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1464884917715945>
- Valdeón, R. A. (2020a). Gatekeeping, ideological affinity and journalistic translation. *Journalism*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1464884920917296>
- Valdeón, R. A. (2020b). On the interface between journalism and translation studies: A historical overview and suggestions for collaborative research. *Journalism Studies*, 21(12), 1644-1661. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2020.1788413>
- van Doorslaer, L. (2010). The double extension of translation in the journalistic field. *Across Languages and Cultures*, 11(2), 175-188. <https://doi.org/10.1556/Acr.11.2010.2.3>
- Wang, H., & Sparks, C. (2019). Chinese newspaper groups in the digital era: The resurgence of the party press. *Journal of Communication*, 69(1), 94-119. <https://doi.org/10.1093/joc/jqy061>
- Wang, H., Sparks, C., & Huang, Y. (2018). Measuring differences in the Chinese press: A study of People's Daily and Southern Metropolitan Daily. *Global Media and China*, 3(3), 125-140. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2059436418806022>
- Welbers, K., & Opgenhaffen, M. (2019). News through a social media filter: Different perspectives on immigration in news on website and social media formats. In L. Davier & K. Conway (Eds.), *Journalism and translation in the era of convergence* (pp. 85-105). John Benjamins Publishing Company. <https://doi.org/10.1075/btl.146.04.wel>
- White, P. R. (2015). Appraisal theory. In K. Tracy, C. Ilie, & T. Sandel (Eds.), *The international encyclopedia of language and social interaction*. <https://doi.org/10.1002/978118611463.wbielsi041>
- Woods, J. S., & Dickson, B. J. (2017). Victims and patriots: Disaggregating nationalism in urban China. *Journal of Contemporary China*, 26(104), 167-182. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10670564.2016.1223100>
- Wu, X. (2018). Framing, reframing and the transformation of stance in news translation: A case study of the translation of news on the China–Japan dispute. *Language and Intercultural Communication*, 18(2), 257-274. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14708477.2017.1304951>
- Xia, L. (2019). *A discourse analysis of news translation in China*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781351021463>
- Xia, L. (2020). Impact of power relations on news translation in China. In W. Wang (Ed.), *Analysing Chinese Language and Discourse across Layers and Genres* (pp. 178-193). <https://doi.org/10.1075/scld.13.10xia>
- Xia, L., & Wang, W. (2015). Reframed news discourse: the manipulative impact of translation on news making. In L. Grujicic-Alatriste (Ed.), *Linking discourse studies to professional practice* (pp. 270-289). Blue Ridge Summit: Multilingual Matters. <https://doi.org/10.21832/9781783094080-019>
- Xin, X. (2018). Popularizing party journalism in China in the age of social media: The case of Xinhua News Agency. *Global Media and China*, 3(1), 3-17. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2059436418768331>

-
- Zeng, W. (2020). Reframing news by different agencies: A case study of translations of news on the US-China trade dispute. *Babel*, 66(4-5), 847-866. <https://doi.org/10.1075/babel.00172.zen>
- Zeng, W., & Sparks, C. (2020). Popular nationalism: Global Times and the US-China trade war. *International Communication Gazette*, 82(1), 26-41. <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F1748048519880723>
- Zhao, Y. (2000). From commercialization to conglomeration: The transformation of the Chinese press within the orbit of the party state. *Journal of Communication*, 50(2), 3-26. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.2000.tb02839.x>

Final Accepted Manuscript