

# A Multi-modal Study on Cultural Interpretation in Subtitle Translation of Corporate Promotional Videos: Taking Taiji Group as the Example

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**Abstract:** Since corporate promotional videos are multi-modal in essence, their translation involves the meaning manifested by non-verbal modes like pictures and colors. Nowadays, most studies on corporate videos focus on the accurate transference of the notional meaning of the source text, without sufficient concern about the cultural elements in these videos, especially the cultural elements embodied in the visual images. Therefore, with Taiji Group of Chongqing as the example, this paper intends to explore the effective way to convey the cultural connotation and brand value of corporate videos, elaborating on how to handle the specific cultural elements presented by the words and pictures. The study may serve as reference for the promotional videos made by other enterprises with profound cultural deposits.

**Keywords:** corporate promotional videos, subtitle translation, multi-modality, cultural interpretation

## 1. Introduction

In today's era of integrated media, corporate promotional videos which combine text, image and sound are undoubtedly the most convenient and efficient tools for corporate external publicity. As the "visual business card" of the enterprise, through the combination of vision and hearing, it can display the enterprise's information more intuitively and vividly. Compared with texts, videos tend to attract the audience's attention more easily, the emotional sound and the visual impact of the picture can also quickly arouse the emotional resonance of readers, improve the communicative effect of information, and help to build a good corporate image. Subtitle translation of corporate promotional videos plays a crucial role in international publicity. Although visual elements can bridge the language barrier, connect directly with the audience, and convey the core message, the auxiliary role of written interpretation cannot be ignored. Text interpretation can provide the audience with a deeper explanation of the content, so that the audience can better understand the content of the picture. Therefore, carefully translated subtitles can complement the visual content and ensure the integrity and accuracy of information transmission, so that the promotional videos can be understood and accepted by audiences in different countries and regions across linguistic and cultural differences.

At present, most researches on subtitle translation of corporate promotional videos mainly focus on the accurate transmission of the conceptual meaning of the original text, without sufficient attention to the cultural elements embodied

in the promotional videos, especially the cultural elements embodied in visual images. However, culture is the soul of an enterprise and the source of its sustainable development, especially for enterprises rooted in traditional Chinese culture, such as tea enterprises and traditional Chinese medicine enterprises. The profound Chinese culture embodied in promotional videos can enhance overseas audiences' cultural identity of the brand, thus enhancing brand value and market competitiveness and helping to build a unique brand image of the enterprise. Therefore, this paper takes the translation of several promotional videos of Chongqing Taiji Group, a famous Chinese traditional medicine enterprise, as examples to explore how to effectively convey the cultural connotation of the corporate promotional videos through subtitle translation, focusing on how to deal with specific cultural elements presented by language and images in the translation process, such as traditional philosophy and traditional Chinese medicine concepts contained in the promotional videos of Taiji Group. By these means, the cultural elements are no longer difficult for the foreign audience to understand. The successful translation can convey the cultural value and corporate image, thus achieving the best effect in international communication, and at the same time providing reference for the external promotion of other enterprises with profound cultural heritage.

## **2. Cultural Interpretation in Multi-modal Translation of Taiji Group's Promotional Videos**

### **2.1 Cultural Elements in Taiji Group's Promotional Videos**

The cultural elements in Taiji Group's promotional videos are rich and profound, reflecting the essence of traditional Chinese culture, especially traditional Chinese medicine culture. A detailed investigation of several Chinese and English bilingual promotional videos of Taiji Group shows that the group's promotional videos mainly contain the following cultural elements:

(1) Traditional Chinese medicine culture. Many traditional Chinese medicine concepts and related Chinese traditional thoughts appear in the promotional videos of Taiji Group, such as the Taiji Diagram, various Chinese herbal medicines, Chinese ideological and cultural terms, and the concept of health care rooted in traditional Chinese medicine.

(2) Traditional production process. Some promotional videos of Taiji Group introduce the production process of traditional Chinese medicine of Taiji Group, such as "Tongjunge traditional pill production technique", which is not only a national intangible cultural heritage, but also a cultural inheritance that Taiji Group is proud of.

(3) Corporate culture and values. Taiji Group's promotional video clearly puts forward the corporate philosophy and business purpose of "caring for life, caring for health", "the nation's largest", "benefiting the people" and "intensive cultivation".

These cultural elements not only show the corporate culture of Taiji Group, but also serve for its external communication both at home and abroad. Special attention should be paid to fully convey them in the translation process. According to the specific context in which they appear, the translation strategy should be flexibly used to achieve the best effect for information transmission, so as to highlight the profound cultural heritage of the company and spread a good brand image.

### **2.2 Cultural Interpretation Strategies in Multi-modal Translation of Taiji Group's Promotional Videos**

Like other corporate promotional videos, images also play a very important role in the promotional videos of Taiji Group, presenting to the readers with rich and specific information, many of which is unique to China. In the process of translation, if these cultural messages are not fully explained, it is likely to weaken the cultural value of the company and affect its overseas brand image. Therefore, when constructing English subtitles, these cultural elements can be concretely interpreted, simplified or transformed according to the types of cultural information conveyed by the text, the image of the promotional video and the interaction between the text and image, so as to help the readers to understand the enterprise better.

### 2.2.1 Concrete Interpretation

In a promotional video, images visually present a lot of information, and captions provide textual explanations and supplement to the graphic information. Some of the information, due to the spread of Chinese culture to the outside world in recent decades, has been familiar to Western audiences and gotten recognized in vision. The translation strategy can be literal translation or transliteration. For example, "八卦" can be directly translated into "Eight Diagrams". However, for some more subtle elements that are not so familiar to Western audiences, additional and more specific explanations may be required to help audiences accurately understand their meanings. For example, one promotional video of Taiji Group begins with an introduction to the philosophy of Tai Chi: "易有太极，是生两仪，两仪生四象。" For audiences familiar with Chinese culture, the concept is easy to understand, but for Western audiences unfamiliar with the philosophy, additional explanation may be needed.

In the English subtitle translation, the translator will say, "Therefore in the system of change there is Tai Chi, which generates two modes (Yin and Yang), the two modes generate the four forms (major and minor Yin and Yang)". In the translation, "太极", which is more familiar to Western readers, is directly transliterated as "Tai Chi", while "两仪" is translated as "two modes" in meaning, and then supplemented with "Yin and Yang". The same method is adopted for "四象", which is first translated as "four forms" and then supplemented as "major and minor Yin and Yang", so that the reader can clearly understand the specific meaning of "two modes" and "four forms" in Tai Chi. And the matching video picture is the gradual evolution of the Yin and Yang diagram of Tai Chi from being hazy to clear, cleverly showing the process of Tai Chi's differentiation into two modes (Yi), that is, the generation of Yin and Yang. Then there is a close-up shot of a man dressed in white pointing his finger at the Yin-Yang diagram of Taiji, providing a specific and intuitive image of the "Yin" and "Yang" in the subtitles. Through the combination of translated language and visual presentation, the concept of Tai Chi producing two modes (Yi) and two modes producing four forms (Xiang), which is deeply rooted in traditional Chinese culture, can transcend linguistic and cultural barriers and be understood by global audience.

### 2.2.2 Reductive Translation

Rooted in deep traditional Chinese culture, Tai Chi Group's promotional videos contain profound elements of Chinese culture. Some cultural elements as mentioned above can be explained concretely, while other cultural elements, if they cannot be explained in concise words, can be simplified without affecting the transmission of the main meaning, reducing the audience's understanding burden. This kind of necessary simplification is very common in subtitle translation, and some scholars call it "the reductive form of translation"<sup>[1]</sup>, which can be divided into three types in actual translation practice: condensation, compressive paraphrasing, and deletion<sup>[2]</sup>.

For example, for the business purposes and concepts of Taiji Group, a promotional video mentions the concept of Taiji Group as "纳百川之辽，承岐黄之道", which has rich cultural connotations. "纳百川之辽" means that the Group is as inclusive as the sea in resources and wisdom, highlighting the openness of the enterprise, while "承岐黄之道" directly points to the source of traditional Chinese medicine, that is, the dialogue between Huangdi and Qibo about medicine, highlighting the long history of traditional Chinese medicine, and also conveying the commitment of Taiji Group to the inheritance and development of traditional Chinese medicine.

Based on the core meaning presented by the image and text, the English subtitle translates "纳百川之辽" as "Taiji Group takes an inclusive attitude", highlighting the inclusiveness of the group. Although "纳百川之辽" not only refers to inclusiveness, but also implies the broadness and greatness brought by inclusiveness. "Take an inclusive attitude" is more often used to describe a positive and liberal social policy or individual or group behavior, which does not have a strong cultural color and far-reaching metaphorical meaning as embracing all rivers. It is a simplified translation of the original text, but since the promotional video itself is limited by time and space, and there is no image of rivers, lakes and seas, this simplified translation can make readers quickly understand the core meaning of the text and the image, which is an

appropriate method. However, the picture which conforms to "承岐黄之道" is the Taiji Group building, which has no direct connection with the text. In this case, it is necessary to focus on the text when translating, the English subtitle here is "carries forward the theory of traditional Chinese medicine", which omits the cultural information for the source of TCM, namely, the traditional Chinese story about Huang Di and Qi Bo, the originators of TCM. In other contexts, the cultural information about Huang Di and Qi Bo might be translated as needed, but the length of the promotional video is limited, and Qi Bo is not a figure familiar to Western audiences. Without any explanation, it would be invalid information for Western audiences who lack Chinese cultural background. Therefore, this reductive translation is enough to convey to the audience that Taiji Group is committed to inheriting and developing traditional Chinese medicine.

### **2.2.3 Conceptual Conversion**

In the translation of corporate promotional videos, it is important to convey the core message, rather than delving into every cultural detail. Therefore, in the translation of promotional videos, in addition to simplifying some cultural details, the translator can also convert them into common concepts familiar to Western readers, and at the same time, more rich cultural connotations can be conveyed by video images.

For example, an important part of Taiji Group's business is its health care project. The Group actively implements the strategy of "Healthy China". By combining traditional Chinese medicine culture and ecological health care, the group has created a series of health products and new ecological health care projects, and has established a health care base named Taiji Wuling Mountain National Forest Park. Therefore, in addition to the introduction of its medical products, Taiji Group's promotional video also focuses on its health care projects.

Both in China and in the West, the idea that prevention from illness is more important than cure is getting more attention. Although they both adopt various means to prevent diseases and promote physical and mental health, the concept and practice of the health care industry in China are different from that in the West. Combining the influence of traditional cultures such as Taoism, Confucianism and TCM, China's health care industry emphasizes the unity of nature and man, pays attention to both internal and external cultivation, and pursues physical and mental balance. Therefore, China's health care projects and products are often closely related to traditional culture and natural resources, such as traditional Chinese medicine health care, forest health care, health care in hot spring and so on. Furthermore, China's health care industry also pays special attention to the elderly population, providing health management and old-age care services for the elderly.

The Western culture of health care is more influenced by ancient Greek philosophy, modern medical science and technology, focusing on scientific evidence and emphasizing physical exercises and nutritional balance. The Western concept of health preservation tends to maintain and promote physical health through physical exercise, reasonable diet and medical care. The different philosophies and modes of thinking formed in the different historical and cultural backgrounds of China and the West directly lead to the difference between focusing on fitness in the West and health maintenance in the East<sup>[3]</sup>.

In the promotional video, "康养项目" is converted into "health project and product", which is familiar to the Western audience. Considering only the text, it is obvious that such transformation cannot reflect the characteristics and connotation of Chinese health. When foreign audiences see "health project and product", they first associate it with various fitness services, scientific and technological products and technologies to promote health, rather than the natural health care rooted in traditional Chinese culture. However, the meaning of promotional videos is not only built by words, video images will play a more important role. When the Group's health care project is introduced, the matching pictures are forests and rivers with rich natural flavor, fully reflecting the concept and characteristics of China's health care. When foreign audiences see such pictures, and then read the "health project and product" in the subtitles, they can eliminate the cognitive stereotype of health projects in their own culture and have a proper understanding of China's health industry.

Therefore, with the support of video images, some unique Chinese cultural concepts are transformed into concepts familiar to Western readers, and the target audience can be guided to correctly understand Chinese cultural concepts with the help of the coordination between images and words.

## **2.3 Deficiencies and Measures for Improvement in Subtitle Translation of Taiji Group's Promotional Videos**

As exemplified above, when translating corporate promotional videos of Taiji Group, which are rich in Chinese cultural implications, the translator handles the cultural elements in the promotional videos flexibly. With the help of video images, the translator conveys profound traditional Chinese culture to Western readers and enables Western readers to understand the unique cultural value of the enterprise. But even so, in terms of the transmission of cultural elements, there are still some deficiencies in the translation of the Group's promotional videos, which causes the loss of some cultural information in the original text and needs to be improved by taking some effective measures.

### **2.3.1 Inadequate Information Transmission**

Corporate promotional videos are multi-modal texts in which images and words convey information together, and for enterprises with profound Chinese cultural origin, a large number of cultural elements will inevitably appear in their promotional videos. Some cultural elements are familiar to Chinese readers, and the image itself is enough for the audience to fully understand its meaning or even its cultural connotation, so there is no need to explain them in subtitles. However, for Western audiences unfamiliar with Chinese culture, visual information rich in Chinese cultural elements will become their cognitive blind spot, if there is no explanation. The value of these cultural information can not be reflected in the process of corporate external publicity, resulting in inadequate information transmission. For example, as Taiji Group is a famous Chinese medicine enterprise in China, Chinese medicinal materials are its core, so Chinese medicinal materials and their names appear for many times in its promotional videos. For readers with Chinese cultural background, when they see the names of these medicinal materials, they will naturally know that they are Chinese medicinal materials, so there is no need to repeat them in the subtitles. However, for Western viewers who are not familiar with Chinese herbal medicine, the information value of the herbs and names in the video images is very limited. For example, in the beginning part of the promo, a core idea of Tai Chi, "balance of Yin and Yang can ensure harmony in all things" is mentioned, and at the end of the promo, a large number of names for Chinese medicine appear in the video when the "Tai Chi spirit of harmony in all things", which is upheld by Tai Chi Group, is reiterated. As some scholars have mentioned, in a multi-modal text, each symbolic mode not only has a specific meaning, but also generates the overall meaning of the text after interacting with other symbolic modes<sup>[4]</sup>. In addition to illustrating the unexpected harmony of all things, the deliberate use of Chinese medicine to refer to all things also emphasizes the connection between Chinese medicine and Tai Chi philosophy, implying that the Chinese medicinal products of Tai Chi Group are the embodiment of natural harmony. However, the English subtitles of these two pictures only convey the meaning of the Chinese subtitles. For foreign viewers who do not know the names of these Chinese herbs, these Chinese characters are meaningless symbols, and the multiple meanings presented by the video images are difficult to be understood by them, which weakens the connection between Taiji Group and Chinese Taiji philosophy to a large extent.

As can be seen from the above case, in the original text, for the audience with Chinese cultural background, the image and the text can be related, strengthening and complementing each other in the transmission of meaning. However, for Western readers, due to their inability to fully understand the meaning of the images, they may not be able to find this correlation. However, if the translation does not reflect this correlation through word processing, the target audience will receive less adequate information than the original audience. Therefore, in the translation of promotional videos, the object of translation is not only the subtitles of the original text, but also the separate explanation and interpretation of some important images.

### 2.3.2 Loss of Emotion

The purpose of corporate publicity is to let foreign audiences understand the enterprise, identify with the enterprise, and have emotional resonance with it. Therefore, emotional transmission plays an important role in the translation of corporate external publicity. Taiji Group is a pharmaceutical company, focusing on human health, so its corporate aim and mission has great emotional value. The promotional videos also use meaningful and emotional language, which can stimulate the emotional response of the audience. However, the linguistic expressions that can arouse the emotional resonance of the Chinese audience may become a merely factual statement in the translation process, which cannot arouse the same emotional association of the Western audience and affect the transmission of emotional value in the corporate external publicity. For example, Taiji Group's corporate purpose and mission are stated as "牢记国之大者，践行国企担当"，"担当国药泽华夏，太极济苍生的使命". As for the first statement "牢记国之大者，践行国企担当" (Remember the greatness of the country, Take the responsibility of a state-owned enterprise), one of the matching video clips is Taiji Group's Anti-Japanese War relief team, the other is the picture and Chinese marks for commemorating the victory of Anti-Japanese War. Such a picture can naturally stimulate the emotional resonance of the Chinese audience, so that they can deeply feel the patriotic contribution of Taiji Group as a state-owned enterprise. For the Chinese audience, seeing "国之大者 (great country)" in the subtitles, they will naturally think of the next sentence "为国为民 (for the country and the people)", so this subtitle explanation is enough to make the Chinese audience have a deep sense of the patriotism and love of the people of Taiji Group, thus identifying with the Group emotionally. However, the English phrase "kept in mind the principle of 'the great power of the country', practicing the responsibility" hardly elicits the same response from Western audience. First of all, as mentioned above, the image here lacks explanation so it is difficult for Western audience to fully understand the meaning of the image, and even misunderstandings may occur. However, the English subtitle "the great power of the country" reminds the Western audience of a country's strong strength and influence in economy, military power, science and technology, culture, politics or other aspects, which has almost nothing to do with the enterprise's dedication to serve the country and the people. Therefore, neither the images nor the English subtitles can provoke emotional response from the target audience, and the promotional video clip loses its emotional value.

Another statement that also illustrates the mission of the company is ""担当国药泽华夏，太极济苍生的使命", which is accompanied by the pictures of the company buildings of Taiji Group, but the two extremely emotional expressions of "泽华夏 (ze hua xia)" and "济苍生 (ji cang sheng)" in the Chinese subtitles give these buildings humanistic feelings. As we all know, "hua xia" will let Chinese people associate with China's long history, rich culture, diverse nationalities, as well as the national spirit of perseverance, self-improvement, unity and cooperation. "ji cang sheng" also carries rich cultural connotations and deep concern for the people. It reminds people of the noble mission of traditional Chinese medicine to help people in the world, which is obviously different from the objectiveness of Western medicine. However, the corresponding English translation is "with the mission of Chinese medicine benefiting China, Taiji benefit the common people". In this translation, "benefit China", "common "people" are relatively neutral expressions, lacking the depth in culture and emotion. Such expressions correspond to the buildings without any emotional color, and it is difficult to arouse the emotional response of foreign audiences. In addition, "benefit China" will make foreign audiences feel that Taiji Group is only concerned about China and has nothing to do with them, so it will be harder for them to have emotional resonance. Therefore, in such cases, if the image lacks emotional color, the linguistic processing needs to be more careful. For the English translation of "with the mission of Chinese medicine benefiting China, Taiji benefit the common people", its focus can be expanded and more emotional expression can be used. If it is translated into "with Chinese medicine benefiting the whole world, Taiji cares all the masses", it can arouse the resonance of foreign audiences and achieve the dissemination effect of the promotional video.

### 2.3.3 False Translation

In addition to the inadequate information transmission and lack of emotion in the translation, there are some errors in the translation of corporate promotional videos, which are caused by failing to understand the accurate meaning of original subtitles with the aid of corresponding pictures. For example, Taiji Group mentioned in the introduction of its product range that in addition to the production of Chinese patent medicine and chemical medicine, it will also produce ethnic medicine. Ethnic medicines refer to the medicines accumulated by ethnic minorities in some areas of China through long-term medical practice and recorded in ethnic minority languages, and have certain regional characteristics in use, such as Tibetan medicine, Mongolian medicine, Miao medicine and so on. Ethnic medicine is the main tool used by ethnic minorities for treatment and prevention, which embodies the wisdom and characteristics of ethnic minorities. As one of the subsidiary companies of Taiji Group is Tibetan Medicine Co., Ltd. affiliated to Tibetan Medicine College, the ethnic medicine here obviously refers to Tibetan medicine. The drug packaging in the video mainly uses the colors of yellow and blue, both of which are representative colors of the Tibetan plateau. Blue, in particular, symbolizes sky or wisdom and is deeply rooted in Tibetan culture and religion. Therefore, judging from the images, it can be inferred that the ethnic medicine here refers to Tibetan medicine. However, the English translation here is a literal translation, and it is translated as "national medicine", which is difficult for foreign audiences to associate with Tibetan medicine, so it is obviously mistranslated. In the process of translation, if the translator fully considers the information conveyed by the image, he or she can avoid misunderstanding and false translation of the text to a large extent. The translation of corporate promotional videos is also external publicity translation. As long as it involves external publicity translation, the translator should fully consider the target audience, adopt domestication-oriented translation strategy, make the translation as close as possible to the reading and thinking habits of foreign audiences, have cross-cultural awareness and proficient bilingual ability, so as to avoid false translations as much as possible<sup>[5]</sup>.

### Conclusion

The purpose of corporate publicity is to shape and maintain corporate image, promote corporate brand and products, so that the enterprise can be recognized by foreign audiences. And in today's visual era, the multi-modal promotional videos integrating images, text and other modes are undoubtedly the best media for corporate external publicity. The well-designed promotional videos of enterprises will generally reflect their own characteristics as much as possible, and for enterprises derived from Chinese traditional culture, highlighting cultural elements will undoubtedly be a major focus of their promotional videos. A case in point is Taiji Group, whose promotional videos are rich in Chinese cultural elements, whether video images or subtitle text. The full transmission of these cultural elements in the translation process of the promotional video is of great importance for the enterprise to build a unique corporate image abroad. However, due to the linguistic and cultural differences between Chinese and English, it is necessary to fully consider the cultural information conveyed by images and original subtitles in the multi-modal translation of promotional videos, and adopt flexible translation strategies, such as concretizing the information presented by pictures and images, simplifying or transforming some cultural details, and adding annotations to the image information difficult for readers to understand. The translator should pay attention to the transmission of emotions, accurately understand the meaning of subtitles with the help of images and translate them properly. Only in this way can we maintain the depth of corporate culture in the translation for corporate external publicity and enhance the brand image and cultural influence of enterprises in the international market.

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