

From China Stories to Cross-Cultural Expression: Cultural Translation and Audience Positioning in Award-Winning Journalism

Liu Pin, Awan Binti Ismail

Kuala Lumpur University of Science and Technology, Malaysia

Email: pingl6830@gmail.com, cloudawan72@gmail.com

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Abstract

This study examines how award-winning Chinese international communication journalism transforms "China stories" into cross-cultural expressions through cultural translation and audience positioning. A census-based, cross-sectional content analysis was conducted on all 40 international communication entries in the 35th China News Award catalogue: six first-prize, 12 second-prize, and 22 third-prize works. Award level, publishing institution, platform, and title-language configuration were recorded as manifest variables, while issue domain, narrative frame, cultural-translation cues, and imagined audience position were coded at catalogue-title level. Frequencies, percentages, cross-tabulations, exploratory Cramer's V statistics, and close readings of contrasting titles were used. Development and cooperation (25.0%), social and human-interest topics (20.0%), and culture and heritage (17.5%) formed the leading issue cluster. Foreign-language elements appeared in 57.5% of titles, but explicit cultural glossing appeared in only 17.5%, indicating that linguistic access was more common than contextual explanation. Witness and learner positions each accounted for 35.0% of the works, whereas partner/dialogue positioning accounted for 17.5%. Platform differences were visible but non-deterministic: similar translation strategies appeared across domestic and international outlets, and global social/video platforms did not automatically produce dialogic positioning. The study concludes that cross-cultural expression is best understood as an alignment among communication context, cultural mediation, narrative framing, audience role, and platform conditions rather than as foreign-language publication or overseas distribution alone. Because independent second-coder data were unavailable, interpretive associations are reported as exploratory pending intercoder validation.

Keywords: China Stories, Cultural Translation, Audience Positioning, International Communication, Content Analysis

Introduction

Digital platforms, mobile communication, and multimodal storytelling have shifted international journalism away from a model of one-way information transmission centred on states and media institutions. Meaning now travels through different languages, cultural memories, platform conventions, and audience expectations. Whether a news story can cross a cultural boundary therefore depends not only on its reach, technological format, or linguistic accuracy, but also on how the story selects Chinese experience, explains culturally specific concepts, allocates narrative agency, and offers audiences an intelligible position from which to enter the account. International communication consequently needs to ask not only what is communicated, but how cultural meaning is reorganised and for whom.

Within Chinese international communication, the call to "tell China's stories well" connects national image, international discursive capacity, and journalistic practice. China's communication system now involves state media, multilingual news organisations, regional outlets, and digital platforms, yet research remains uneven in its treatment of particular media products and production mechanisms (Hartig, 2019). The slogan is also not a value-neutral instruction to make narratives attractive. It simultaneously performs international and domestic political work and coordinates strategic narratives across actors and channels (Xu & Gong, 2024). Works produced under this broad orientation may therefore differ substantially in their subjects, evidence, languages, platforms, and modes of cultural explanation.

English and other foreign languages can expand potential accessibility, but linguistic substitution does not automatically remove cultural distance. English-medium national storytelling remains connected to image and discursive power, while culturally specific political, historical, and social meanings may not acquire an equivalent significance merely because their wording changes (Lin & Liu, 2024). Cross-cultural communication also requires the reorganisation of background knowledge, narrative logic, cultural reference points, and audience assumptions. This study uses the term cultural translation for that broader process.

Background and Research Problem

The immediate background to this study is the transition from content export to cross-cultural expression. A conventional transmission model imagines a communicator sending a stable message through a channel to an overseas audience. Such a model underestimates the fact that a concept requiring no explanation in China may lack an equivalent elsewhere; that a familiar historical symbol may need contextualisation on an international platform; and that a national development narrative may become intelligible only when anchored in a person, an everyday practice, or a shared public problem.

The cross-border circulation of a China story can thus be understood as three connected operations. Story selection identifies the Chinese experiences treated as internationally meaningful. Cultural translation explains and reorganises those experiences. Audience positioning anticipates what potential readers or viewers know, care about, and are invited to do with the story. Together these operations determine whether a work remains a display of cultural content or becomes a communicative form with an intelligible point of entry.

Four research problems follow. First, language translation is often treated as equivalent to cultural translation, although an English title may retain political concepts, historical assumptions, and evaluative logics intelligible mainly to domestic audiences. Second, the overseas audience is frequently imagined as a homogeneous public, even though audiences differ by language, region, cultural distance, media practice, and knowledge of China. Third, narrative, translation, and platform are commonly studied separately, leaving their relationships under-specified. Fourth, textual audience positioning is too easily mistaken for actual audience reception. A work may address audiences as witnesses or partners without demonstrating that real audiences accepted that role. This study therefore examines textual construction rather than communication effects.

International Communication and the Construction of China Stories

International communication scholarship has traditionally examined the cross-border movement of information through the lenses of national image, soft power, public diplomacy, discursive authority, and media power. These approaches correctly foreground institutional and political asymmetries, but they can also imply a linear sender-message-channel-receiver sequence. In practice, a news item entering another cultural setting is selected, shortened, translated, reframed, captioned, platformed, and recombined with local expectations. The China story is therefore not a pre-existing package but a journalistic construction made at the intersection of strategic orientation, news values, cultural specificity, and imagined reception.

This distinction matters when award-winning works are studied. The China News Award does not represent the ordinary population of Chinese international communication. It institutionalises professional judgements about news value, quality, and innovation. Recent research has identified concise, substantive, and innovative narrative tendencies in the 35th award cycle (Shen & Jiang, 2025) and has begun to map the structural features of international communication winners across multiple award cycles (Wang & Ounpipat, 2026). The present study moves inside one complete award-year corpus to ask how professionally recognised works organise cultural difference and construct a prospective cross-cultural public.

Cultural Translation as Journalistic Recontextualisation

Journalistic translation is not a mechanical reproduction of an original text. It is entangled with selection, editing, rewriting, framing, and institutional routines (Bielsa & Bassnett, 2009; Valdeón, 2015). Studies of news recontextualisation show that translated accounts can redistribute agency, background, stance, and the boundaries of an event (Kang, 2007; Wu, 2018). Online and multimodal news further distributes this work across language, images, sound, captions, and interface cues (Altahmazi, 2020). Cultural translation is therefore defined here as the selection, explanation, connection, and recontextualisation of meanings embedded in Chinese social and cultural settings so that they can enter another interpretive environment.

Cultural translation does not require the erasure of difference. Cultural proximity may facilitate audience entry when stories connect with familiar languages, experiences, or values (Straubhaar, 1991), but proximity can be built through family, work, aspiration, friendship, sport, ecological responsibility, or shared public problems without making Chinese history and institutions disappear. The more defensible principle is explained particularity: retain the

specificity of Chinese experience while supplying the concepts, persons, and relationships through which that specificity can be understood.

Narrative Framing and Audience Positioning

Framing organises a story by making particular problems, causes, responsibilities, evaluations, and responses salient (Entman, 1993). The same national experience can consequently be narrated as institutional development, personal striving, cultural inheritance, transnational cooperation, ecological responsibility, or a response to controversy. Images and text may contribute differently to this framing work, which is especially relevant to international multimedia journalism (Powell et al., 2015). In this study, the primary frame is treated as the organising logic that connects a title's main subject to its implied route of interpretation.

Audience design proposes that communicators adjust language and style in relation to their anticipated recipients (Bell, 1984). The related concept of imagined audiences directs attention to how producers construct a public before measurable reception occurs (Marwick & boyd, 2011; Nelson, 2021). In international journalism, language choice, explanatory density, narrative person, foreign voices, and invitations to interact can position audiences as observers, learners, witnesses, partners, or participants. Cultural translation and audience positioning are thus interdependent: translation organises what becomes intelligible, while positioning organises the relationship through which that intelligibility is offered.

Platform Conditions of Multimodal International Communication

Platforms are not neutral addresses. Their interfaces, recommendation systems, duration norms, captioning practices, visual conventions, and engagement metrics condition cultural production (Nieborg & Poell, 2018). Social media logic also privileges programmability, popularity, connectivity, and datafication (Van Dijck & Poell, 2013). A work published through a news application, international broadcaster, multilingual website, or global video platform therefore enters a different set of technical and audience conditions. These conditions may alter the density of background explanation, the visibility of foreign-language cues, the pace of a story, and the role offered to users. They constrain and enable expression without determining it.

Analytical Framework, Objectives and Research Questions

Prior studies have examined four relevant problems, but mostly as separate lines of inquiry. Research on China's international communication has concentrated on national image, soft power, discursive authority, and the strategic work of "telling China's story well" (Hartig, 2019; Xu & Gong, 2024). Journalistic translation research has shown that cross-border news is selected, rewritten, framed, and multimodally recontextualised rather than merely rendered into another language (Bielsa & Bassnett, 2009; Kang, 2007; Valdeón, 2015; Wu, 2018; Altahmazi, 2020). Framing and imagined-audience scholarship has separately explained how texts organise interpretation and how producers anticipate publics (Entman, 1993; Bell, 1984; Marwick & boyd, 2011; Nelson, 2021). Platform studies, meanwhile, have demonstrated how interfaces, recommendation systems, and engagement logics condition cultural production (Van Dijck & Poell, 2013; Nieborg & Poell, 2018). Studies of China News Award winners have identified broad narrative tendencies and institutional or structural patterns, but have not jointly operationalised cultural-translation cues, narrative frames,

audience roles, and platform conditions within a complete international-communication award corpus (Shen & Jiang, 2025; Wang & Ounpipat, 2026).

Taken together, these studies leave two related questions unresolved. Empirically, it remains unclear whether linguistic accessibility is accompanied by cultural explanation, how particular frames position prospective audiences as observers, learners, witnesses, or partners, and whether such combinations vary across institutions, platforms, and award levels. Theoretically, the literature does not yet explain cross-cultural expression as an alignment among cultural mediation, narrative organisation, imagined audience role, and platform conditions. It therefore cannot adequately distinguish overseas visibility from cross-cultural intelligibility or producer-designed audience positioning from actual reception.

The present study addresses this gap through a census of all 40 international communication winners in the 35th China News Award. The analytical framework in Table 1 treats communication context, cultural translation, narrative framing, audience positioning, and contextual fit as connected but analytically distinct dimensions. Context variables record where and by whom a work was published; interpretive variables identify how catalogue titles and metadata organise cultural meaning and offer a prospective audience role. This design permits an empirical examination of integration at the textual and catalogue level while avoiding unsupported claims about actual audience reception.

Table 1

Analytical framework and alignment with the research questions

Dimension	Core question	Observable indicators and RQ alignment
Communication context	Under what institutional and platform conditions does the work circulate?	Award level, institution, title language, platform, form, and issue domain (RQ1, RQ4)
Cultural translation	How does Chinese experience become cross-culturally intelligible?	Language transfer, cultural gloss, universal experience, foreign mediator, relational connection, and institutional exposition (RQ2, RQ4)
Narrative framing	How is the event organised into a route of interpretation?	Issue definition, actor, causal relation, responsibility, evaluation, and response (RQ1, RQ4)
Audience positioning	What interpretive role is offered to the prospective audience?	Knowledge assumption, cultural distance, observer, learner, witness, partner, or participant (RQ3, RQ4)
Contextual fit	How do context, translation, frame, and audience role form a cross-cultural expression?	Integrated explanatory configurations rather than a single best model (RQ5)

Note. RQ = research question. The framework distinguishes manifest context data from interpretive textual coding.

The study aims to describe the thematic, narrative, linguistic, institutional, and platform structure of all international communication winners in the 35th China News Award; identify their principal cultural-translation strategies; examine how they position prospective cross-cultural audiences; compare these patterns across award levels and platforms; and integrate the results into an explanatory account of cross-cultural expression.

Accordingly, the study asks: (RQ1) What themes, narrative frames, title-language configurations, institutions, and platforms characterise the corpus? (RQ2) Which cultural-translation strategies are visible, and how are they combined? (RQ3) How do the works position prospective cross-cultural audiences? (RQ4) How do translation strategies and audience positions vary by platform and award level? (RQ5) What relationship between cultural translation and audience positioning best explains the movement from China stories to cross-cultural expression?

The study contributes theoretically by specifying cross-cultural expression as a relational configuration rather than a linear content-channel sequence. It contributes empirically by examining that configuration across the complete 40-work category, allowing the study to show which dimensions co-occur, which remain disconnected, and how patterns differ by platform and award level. Methodologically, it operationalises cultural translation and imagined audience roles while separating manifest catalogue facts from interpretive coding and textual positioning from actual reception. For Malaysian and Southeast Asian scholarship, the framework provides comparative dimensions for multilingual and multi-ethnic media environments without presuming that findings from China directly describe regional audience reception.

Methods

A cross-sectional design combined quantitative content analysis with qualitative close reading. Content analysis was used to identify distributions and relationships among award level, title language, issue, narrative frame, cultural-translation cues, audience position, publishing institution, and platform. Close reading of typical and contrasting titles then clarified how frequently observed combinations organised cross-cultural meaning. This sequence prevented illustrative cases from substituting for the corpus while avoiding the reduction of textual difference to frequency alone (Krippendorff, 2018; Neuendorf, 2017).

Research Design

The design privileged manifest evidence. Award level, institution, platform, and the visible language of the catalogue title were transcribed as structural variables. Issue, primary frame, translation cues, and audience position were assigned only when the full catalogue title provided identifiable semantic evidence. A foreign language, foreign person, or overseas platform was not treated by itself as proof of successful cross-cultural communication. All relationships were interpreted as co-occurrence within a non-experimental, single-award-year corpus, not as causal effects.

Research Population and Data Collection

The population was derived from the official Catalogue of Winning Works in the 35th China News Award. The full catalogue contained 373 entries: 74 first-prize, 113 second-prize, and 186 third-prize works. Inclusion required an explicit classification under the international

communication category. All 40 eligible entries were retained as a census: six first-prize, 12 second-prize, and 22 third-prize works (All-China Journalists Association, 2025). The term sample below refers to the coded corpus and does not imply probability-based generalisation to other award years or non-winning journalism.

Data collection was completed in August 2026. Each award table was screened by category, after which the title, creators, editors, publishing platform, releasing organisation, and nominating organisation were transcribed. The 40 records were checked for duplicates. A series, column, documentary, or multi-episode project counted as one unit whenever it appeared as one award entry. Shen and Jiang (2025) informed interpretation of the award cycle's wider narrative context but did not add statistical cases or replace catalogue evidence.

Unit of Analysis

The primary unit of analysis was one international communication work as listed in the award catalogue. Team size, number of episodes, and number of publishing organisations were attributes of that work rather than separate cases. For title coding, the unit was the complete catalogue title, including subtitles, parenthetical bilingual forms, and series labels. For institutional and platform variables, the observable units were the releasing organisation and listed publishing outlet. Where several were present, all information was retained and a primary category assigned according to prespecified codebook rules.

The unit of inference was equally restricted. A title can indicate how producers name an event, signal cultural knowledge, and imagine an audience, but it cannot represent every visual, sonic, interactive, or narrative feature of the completed work. Nor can it demonstrate reception. The analysis therefore uses formulations such as "the title indicates," "the catalogue records," and "the text positions" rather than claims about audience acceptance, behavioural effects, or attitude change.

Coding Categories and Operational Definitions

The codebook separated manifest structural variables, single-choice semantic variables, and multiple-response translation variables. Single-choice variables followed a dominant-meaning rule; multiple-response variables allowed several translation cues to co-occur. Every interpretive variable included an insufficient-information category to prevent forced inference. Table 2 specifies the categories and decision rules needed to reproduce the coding.

Table 2

Coding categories and operational definitions

Variable	Operational rule	Categories	Form
Award level	Award level recorded in the official catalogue	First; second; third	Single/manifest
Title-language configuration	Language combination in the complete catalogue title; a foreign proper noun alone does not create a bilingual code	Chinese only; foreign only; bilingual/parallel; Chinese-foreign mixed	Single/manifest
Issue domain	Primary object that defines the title's central issue	Politics/governance; development/cooperation; culture/heritage; social/human interest; ecology/environment; international relations/security; insufficient information	Single/semantic
Primary narrative frame	Dominant explanatory organisation of subject and problem	Institutional; human-centred; cultural discovery; relational/cooperation; problem/controversy; ecological responsibility; insufficient information	Single/semantic
Cultural-translation cue	Visible route through which Chinese experience is made accessible or intelligible	Language transfer; cultural gloss; universal experience; foreign/third-party mediator; relational connection; institutional exposition; no explicit cue	Multiple/semantic
Audience position	Primary cognitive or relational role offered to the prospective audience	Observer/information; learner/interpreter; witness/empathic; partner/dialogue; participant; unable to determine	Single/semantic
Platform type	Primary publishing outlet listed in the catalogue	Domestic news; global social/video; international-facing news; overseas media; multi-platform	Single/manifest
Institution level	Organisational level of the releasing body	Central/national; provincial/regional; municipal/local; joint	Single/manifest

Note. Participant required an explicit choice, input, action, or contribution mechanism and was not inferred from a platform name.

Coding Procedure and Intercoder Reliability

Coding proceeded in six stages. First, international communication entries were extracted into 40 records and assigned unique identifiers CNA35-IC01 to CNA35-IC40. Second, titles and organisation names were cleaned for spacing and character consistency while the original strings were retained alongside cleaned fields. Third, an initial codebook was derived from the research questions and literature, with inclusion, exclusion, and boundary rules for every variable. Fourth, a stratified pilot should use four works (approximately 10%) across all award levels and different platforms to identify overlapping categories and inconsistent use of "unable to determine." Fifth, after revision, both coders should independently code the formal dataset without consulting each other's judgements. Sixth, agreement should be calculated before disagreements are discussed; original, reliability, and adjudicated values should be retained separately.

For nominal variables, intercoder reliability is to be estimated with Cohen's kappa, supported by percentage agreement (Cohen, 1960). Each cultural-translation cue is to be treated as a separate present/absent binary item. The prespecified reliability subset is 10 works (25% of the corpus), stratified as two first-prize, three second-prize, and five third-prize entries. A kappa of .80 or above is treated as strong agreement; .67-.79 requires transparent qualification and codebook revision; values below .67 require redefinition and recoding before confirmatory comparison (Krippendorff, 2018). If prevalence distorts kappa, raw agreement, category distribution, and disagreement type should also be reported.

At the time of manuscript preparation, no independent second-coder file for these 40 works was available. No kappa value is therefore reported, estimated, or inferred. Manifest counts can be checked directly against the catalogue; interpretive counts for theme, frame, translation, and audience position remain provisional until the planned independent coding is completed. This limitation is carried into the Results and Conclusion rather than being concealed by treating repeated self-coding or automated matching as independent agreement.

Data Analysis

Frequencies and percentages were calculated for all variables. Each multiple-response translation cue was reported as the number and percentage of works in which it appeared, so those percentages may exceed 100% in total. Cross-tabulations examined award level by frame, platform by title language, platform by translation cue, and platform by audience position. Cramer's V was used descriptively to indicate the magnitude of selected associations. Because the corpus contained only 40 works and many expected cells were below five, no inferential significance claim was made from sparse tables. Qualitative comparison followed the quantitative description and selected high-frequency, low-frequency, and contrary examples according to representativeness, difference, and interpretability.

Results

This section reports catalogue-level findings for the 40 works. Except for multiple-response cultural-translation cues, all percentages use 40 as the denominator. Award level, title, publishing institution, and platform are manifest catalogue data. Theme, frame, cultural translation, and audience position are interpretive codes pending independent reliability

validation. The results refer to titles and metadata, not the complete multimodal works or actual audience effects.

Profile of the Award-Winning Works

Table 3 shows a layered production field rather than one dominated numerically by national media. Provincial or regional organisations accounted for 55.0% of the corpus, compared with 32.5% for central or national organisations. Regional outlets therefore constituted an important institutional route through which local culture, ecological experience, and transnational connections entered professionally recognised international communication. The platform distribution was similarly mixed: international-facing news outlets formed the largest single category, but almost one third of works were listed on domestic news platforms. International communication in the award system consequently encompassed cross-border distribution and domestically hosted content designed for outward circulation or dual publics.

Table 3

Profile of the 40 award-winning international communication works

Dimension	Category	n	%
Award level	First prize	6	15.0
	Second prize	12	30.0
	Third prize	22	55.0
Publishing institution	Central/national	13	32.5
	Provincial/regional	22	55.0
	Municipal/local	4	10.0
	Joint	1	2.5
Platform	International-facing news outlet	15	37.5
	Domestic news platform	13	32.5
	Global social/video platform	8	20.0
	Overseas media outlet	4	10.0
Catalogue-title language	Chinese only	17	42.5
	Bilingual/parallel	16	40.0
	Chinese-foreign mixed	7	17.5

Note. N = 40. Categories within each dimension sum to 100%.

Title language displayed a hybrid rather than substitutive pattern. Twenty-three works (57.5%) contained a visible foreign-language element, yet every catalogue entry retained Chinese wording or a Chinese explanatory anchor. The catalogue therefore tended to add a foreign-language entrance while preserving the domestic semantic source. This measure

should not be confused with the languages of full subtitles, narration, interfaces, or overseas release.

Themes, Narrative Subjects and Story Forms

The issue structure was plural. Development/cooperation, social/human-interest, and culture/heritage together accounted for 62.5% of the corpus (Table 4). These categories moved China stories beyond policy description by using development processes, situated persons, and cultural practices as points of entry. Institutional explanation remained important, particularly in works such as *A New Type of Political Party System That Has Grown Out of Chinese Soil* and *Structural Reforms: Key Priority Areas*. However, titles concerning a Tibetan female fighter pilot, China's first Tibetan Olympic champion, and international visitors learning intangible cultural heritage in Henan exemplified an experiential route that lowered cultural distance through actors and practices.

Table 4

Issue domains and title-level story forms

Dimension	Category	n	%
Issue domain	Development/cooperation	10	25.0
	Social/human interest	8	20.0
	Culture/heritage	7	17.5
	International relations/security	6	15.0
	Politics/governance	5	12.5
	Ecology/environment	3	7.5
	Insufficient title information	1	2.5
Primary story form	Human-centred/biographical	11	27.5
	Institutional/explanatory	7	17.5
	Cultural discovery	7	17.5
	Relational/cooperation	7	17.5
	Problem/controversy	4	10.0
	Ecological responsibility	3	7.5
	Insufficient title information	1	2.5

Note. N = 40. Interpretive coding remains subject to independent intercoder validation.

Human-centred or biographical framing was the largest single story form, but it did not replace institutional, cultural, relational, issue-response, or ecological frames. First-prize titles placed relatively more emphasis on institutional explanation and problem/controversy, whereas second- and third-prize titles contained more human, cultural, and relational frames. This contrast is descriptive only: the first-prize group contained six works and 20 of 21

expected cells in the award-by-frame table were below five. The title Travellers was retained as insufficient information rather than classified from award status or media identity, illustrating the study's manifest-evidence rule.

Cultural Translation Strategies

The works used overlapping routes into cross-cultural meaning (Table 5). The most consequential contrast was between visible linguistic access and contextual explanation. Bilingual or mixed titles such as *Faces of Xinjiang, China: Race to the Future*, and *Soaring Through the Ocean* lowered an initial recognition barrier. Yet explicit language transfer appeared in 23 works while cultural glossing appeared in only seven. A title could therefore become legible in another language without explaining why its cultural object mattered.

Table 5

Title-level cultural-translation strategies

Strategy	n	%	Operational reading
Explicit language transfer	23	57.5	Visible bilingual or mixed-language title
Universal-experience anchor	14	35.0	Dream, life, work, family, sport, or ecological responsibility
Relational connection	14	35.0	Cooperation, friendship, encounter, assistance, or cross-border flow
Foreign/third-party mediator	13	32.5	Foreign person, international institution, or cross-national actor
Institutional exposition	10	25.0	Governance, reform, industry, policy, or development mechanism
Cultural gloss/explanation	7	17.5	Explanatory cue for a culturally specific term, symbol, or practice
No explicit title-level cue	1	2.5	Title provides insufficient evidence

Note. N = 40. Multiple coding was permitted; percentages therefore exceed 100% in total. Interpretive coding remains subject to independent intercoder validation.

A second route connected macro-level subjects with shared human experience. Titles concerning dreams, professions, health, sport, family, and food enabled national development, ethnicity, or international cooperation to be entered through situated lives. A third route used foreign actors and relational vocabulary. Interviews with international figures, stories of friendship, assistance to foreign fishers, and movement from a French farm to a Chinese table positioned China inside an event shared with others rather than as an isolated object of display.

The clearest cultural-translation titles organised discovery or hybridisation. *Secrets You Don't Know About the Terracotta Warriors* presupposed a knowledge gap; *Learning Intangible Cultural Heritage in Henan* converted cultural knowledge into experience; *China china* linked the meanings of china, porcelain, and China; and *When Chinese Kung Fu Meets Paris* staged

a cultural encounter. Institutional translation formed a different but equally legitimate route. Works on governance, reform, industrial systems, and development paths required conceptual clarity and evidence rather than simply a more emotional story.

Audience Positioning

The catalogue titles most often constructed prospective audiences as witnesses or learners (Table 6). Together, these positions accounted for 70.0% of the corpus. Learning positions were common in institutional and cultural-discovery frames, where words such as observe, secrets, experience, pathways, and focus acknowledged a knowledge gap and promised explanation. Witness positions drew audiences into a life, scene, or aspiration without requiring extensive prior knowledge. Their accessibility, however, may come at the cost of reducing complex people to symbols of a predetermined national theme.

Table 6

Audience positions constructed by catalogue titles

Audience position	n	%	Empirical meaning
Witness/empathic	14	35.0	Invited to enter a person, scene, or lived experience
Learner/interpreter	14	35.0	Invited to understand a concept, culture, or system
Partner/dialogue	7	17.5	Positioned within cooperation, friendship, or shared interests
Observer/information	4	10.0	Asked to assess an event, issue, claim, or position
Unable to determine	1	2.5	Catalogue title supplies insufficient evidence

Note. N = 40. These are textually imagined positions, not measured audience responses.

Partner/dialogue positioning was less frequent but analytically important. Titles organised around friendship, cooperation, mutual assistance, or shared interests shifted the communicative relation from "we show you China" towards "we act within a common situation." Observer positions were concentrated in controversy, security, and international-relations stories, where fact assessment and evidentiary boundaries were more important than emotional closeness. These audience roles are not a hierarchy. Their quality depends on fit with the issue, evidence burden, and journalistic purpose.

Relationships among Platforms, Translation Strategies and Audience Positioning

Platform and title language were only weakly associated. Foreign-language elements appeared in 61.5% of titles listed on domestic news platforms, 62.5% on global social/video platforms, 60.0% on international-facing news outlets, and 25.0% on overseas media. The exploratory Cramer's V was .189. The lower overseas-media proportion largely reflects Chinese catalogue naming and cannot establish the language of actual broadcast. Platform location did not mechanically determine bilingual or mixed-language titling.

Audience positions varied more clearly across platforms (Table 7). Learning dominated the global social/video group, whereas partner positioning was most frequent within the domestic-platform group. International-facing outlets combined witness, learner, observer, and partner roles. The exploratory association was Cramer's $V = .334$, but 18 of 20 expected cells were below five; no significance inference is warranted. Most importantly, social platforms did not automatically generate participatory or dialogic expression, and relational storytelling was not exclusive to overseas distribution.

Table 7

Audience positioning by platform type

Platform type	n	Most frequent position	Other positions
Domestic news platform	13	Partner 5 (38.5%)	Witness 4; learner 3; observer 1
Global social/video platform	8	Learner 5 (62.5%)	Witness 3
International-facing news outlet	15	Witness 6 (40.0%)	Learner 4; observer 3; partner 1; undetermined 1
Overseas media outlet	4	Learner 2 (50.0%)	Witness 1; partner 1

Note. Exploratory Cramer's $V = .334$. Eighteen of 20 expected cells were below five; no significance inference is made.

The strategy cross-tabulation reinforces that conclusion (Table 8). Global social/video titles combined language transfer, universal experience, and institutional explanation but displayed no relational-connection cue. Domestic platforms had the largest within-group number of relational titles. International-facing outlets showed the most dispersed repertoire, consistent with their simultaneous roles in institutional explanation, human storytelling, and international relationship construction. Platform was a condition of expression, not an independent cause of it.

Table 8

Selected cultural-translation strategies by platform type

Platform type	n	Language transfer	Relational connection	Foreign mediator	Institutional exposition
Domestic news platform	13	8 (61.5%)	6 (46.2%)	3 (23.1%)	2 (15.4%)
Global social/video platform	8	5 (62.5%)	0 (0.0%)	2 (25.0%)	3 (37.5%)
International-facing news outlet	15	9 (60.0%)	6 (40.0%)	6 (40.0%)	5 (33.3%)
Overseas media outlet	4	1 (25.0%)	2 (50.0%)	2 (50.0%)	0 (0.0%)

Note. Multiple coding was permitted. Percentages are within platform type. Interpretive associations are exploratory.

Synthesis: Patterns of Cross-Cultural Expression

Table 9 integrates issue, frame, translation, and audience coding into five recurrent configurations. These are ideal-typical combinations, not mutually exclusive genres. A work may contain secondary features, but its dominant frame and audience role identify the configuration that best explains its catalogue-level expression.

Table 9

Synthesised patterns of cross-cultural expression

Pattern	Typical configuration	Primary domain	Interpretive criterion
Explanatory-institutional	Institutional exposition + learner/observer	Governance, reform, and development	Intelligibility depends on evidence and conceptual clarification
Humanised witnessing	Universal experience + human-centred frame + witness	Work, life, sport, and aspiration	Emotional access should retain social complexity
Relational partnership	Foreign mediator + relational connection + partner	Friendship, cooperation, and cross-border flows	Foreign presence matters when actors share an event relationship
Cultural discovery/hybridisation	Language transfer + cultural gloss + learner	Heritage, crafts, performance, and symbols	Translation moves beyond display when background and practice are explained
Issue response	Problem frame + institutional evidence + observer	Disputes, risks, and international contestation	Professional value rests on verifiable evidence, not stance intensity alone

Note. Patterns are ideal-typical combinations and are not mutually exclusive genres.

Across the five configurations, the corpus shows an incomplete movement from content display towards multiple forms of meaning mediation. Linguistic conversion was considerably more common than cultural explanation; learner and witness roles were much more common than partner roles; and platform differences existed without becoming deterministic. At the same time, the numerical prominence of regional media indicates that local experience has become an important resource for international communication. The central empirical pattern is therefore contextual fit: cross-cultural expression arises when cultural mediation, narrative organisation, and audience role are aligned with the issue and communication setting.

Discussion

The findings do not identify a single superior formula for international communication. They reveal a relational problem: how professionally recognised journalism translates culturally specific experience, organises an audience's route into that experience, and uses

platform resources without allowing those resources to determine journalistic meaning. This section interprets that problem through recontextualisation, imagined audiences, and platform conditions.

Cultural Translation and the Recontextualisation of China Stories

The findings support the proposition that news translation is recontextualisation rather than linguistic transfer alone (Bielsa & Bassnett, 2009; Kang, 2007; Valdeón, 2015). The corpus's bilingual naming, human mediation, cultural glossing, and relational connection show that cultural translation participates in the remaking of a China story. It changes what background is supplied, who receives agency, which causal sequence is foregrounded, and how a story is connected to another public's knowledge.

This recontextualisation operates at three levels. Symbolic access uses bilingual titles and foreign-language cues to answer the preliminary question, "What is this?" Narrative reorganisation decides which concepts require explanation, which actors can carry the account, and which causal and evaluative relations make it coherent. Relational positioning arranges the relationship among communicator, news subject, and prospective audience. A foreign protagonist contributes to cross-cultural expression only when that actor has an intelligible role and agency; a universal value creates proximity only when it remains anchored in verifiable experience.

The marked gap between language transfer and cultural glossing clarifies the theoretical distinction between accessibility and intelligibility. Foreign-language visibility can reduce the cost of initial entry, but it cannot supply historical context, institutional explanation, or an account of why a cultural practice matters. Conversely, removing all particularity in pursuit of universality can produce stories that are easily consumed but socially thin. Explained particularity resolves this tension by keeping Chinese experience historically and institutionally specific while creating accurate routes through which audiences can interpret it.

The professional implication is that cultural translation should enter selection, reporting, titling, editing, and multimodal design, not be added after the Chinese-language work is complete. Telling a China story well is not merely a matter of narrative attraction. It requires factual truth, cultural specificity, and cross-cultural intelligibility to be organised within the same journalistic product.

Audience Positioning and Cross-Cultural Meaning Construction

Prospective audiences enter journalism before distribution as imagined publics. The learner, witness, partner, and observer positions identified here correspond to different assumptions about audience knowledge, identity, and agency. A learning position begins from informational asymmetry and can responsibly lower a conceptual threshold, but it can also preserve an educator-learner hierarchy if the communicator alone defines what the audience should know. A witnessing position converts social conditions into lived experience, but it risks instrumentalising a person as evidence for a predetermined value.

Partner positioning has stronger dialogic potential because it places Chinese and non-Chinese actors within a shared event, problem, or interest. Its scarcity in the corpus suggests

that award-winning work is more practised at helping audiences understand or feel China than at constructing reciprocal relations. Nevertheless, partner language in a title remains a producer-designed invitation. It does not establish that real audiences participated, agreed, or experienced equality. Observer positioning, meanwhile, is appropriate when controversy or risk imposes a high evidentiary burden. Cross-cultural communication should not replace factual clarity with obligatory emotional intimacy.

Cross-cultural meaning is therefore relational rather than simply contained in a text. It depends on what a work assumes audiences already know, the identity from which they are invited to interpret, and whether their cultural experience is acknowledged as a legitimate source of meaning. This extends audience-design scholarship by showing that audience imagination is not only a matter of tone or address; it is also embedded in background explanation, actor configuration, frame, and the distribution of interpretive authority.

Platform Conditions

The results reject simple platform determinism. YouTube, Facebook, international news applications, and overseas broadcast outlets create conditions for cross-border visibility, but they do not themselves perform cultural explanation. Domestic platforms can host outward-facing and relational work, while global platforms can retain a strongly instructional structure. The same strategy can operate across platforms, and one platform can accommodate institutional, human-centred, and cultural-discovery stories.

Platform conditions are better understood as constraining resources. Short titles, rapid video rhythms, subtitles, thumbnails, recommendation systems, and interaction metrics may lower entry barriers and improve visibility. They may also compress cultural background and reward immediate recognisability over complexity. Professional platform adaptation should therefore be judged not by whether a work is shorter, faster, or more visually intense, but by whether formal change improves understanding without sacrificing evidence and context.

Practical and Regional Implications

Four practical implications follow. First, audience positioning should precede format selection. At the planning stage, producers should identify the prospective audience's location, language repertoire, cultural knowledge, and relationship to the issue before selecting platform and translation form. Second, cultural intelligibility should be included in editorial review alongside fact-checking and linguistic accuracy. Reviewers should ask whether China-specific concepts are explained, analogies are accurate, foreign actors retain agency, and the work relies on background knowledge available mainly to domestic audiences.

Third, translation strategies should follow journalistic function. Institutional and controversial issues need conceptual precision, evidence, and causal completeness; heritage stories need historical and social context; human stories must retain the complexity of individual experience; and cooperation stories should give each actor a recognisable role. Fourth, translation specialists, international editors, reporters, platform practitioners, and people familiar with target cultures should enter production before the final-language stage. Audience previews, cultural-sensitivity reading, and comparison among multilingual versions can expose hidden knowledge assumptions.

These implications are particularly relevant to Malaysia and Southeast Asia, where "overseas audience" cannot reasonably be reduced to a uniform English-speaking public. Malay, English, Chinese varieties, and other linguistic and cultural repertoires interact with different ethnic, religious, historical, and regional experiences. The present study does not measure Malaysian reception, but it suggests that regional adaptation should begin with audience differentiation and cultural explanation rather than literal translation into one presumed lingua franca.

Conclusion

Award-winning Chinese international communication is moving beyond a single model of national display. Its strongest works use institutional explanation, human witnessing, relational cooperation, cultural discovery, or issue response according to the subject and the audience position required. The study's principal conclusion is not that any one mode should dominate, but that cross-cultural expression depends on fit among communication context, cultural mediation, narrative frame, audience role, and platform conditions.

This conclusion distinguishes visibility from understanding. Foreign-language wording and overseas distribution can create entry and reach, but they do not by themselves recontextualise experience. Cultural translation becomes journalistically meaningful when it preserves the specificity of Chinese facts and practices while providing accurate, open, and accountable interpretive routes. Audience positioning becomes meaningful when it recognises different knowledge and identities without treating audiences merely as targets of persuasion.

Limitations and Future Research

The corpus has a winning- and success-case bias. It represents work recognised by a professional award system, not the routine population of Chinese international journalism. Comparative research should include ordinary, non-winning, unsuccessful, and discontinued projects. The single-year cross-section may also reflect the international agenda, platform environment, and judging rules of one award cycle; longitudinal analysis across award years is needed.

The primary materials were catalogue entries rather than a complete archive of webpages, video, audio, subtitles, interactive interfaces, and social circulation. The study can therefore support claims about title language and catalogue metadata, but not full visual framing, sound design, subtitle quality, interaction, or actual reception. Future work should assemble complete multimodal archives and code text, image, sound, animation, and interface together.

Independent second-coder data were unavailable. Theme, frame, translation, and audience-position counts must be validated through the prespecified double-coding procedure before they are treated as reliability-certified journal statistics. Future audience research should also use interviews, focus groups, surveys, experiments, comment analysis, and digital trace data to compare designed, reached, and participating audiences. Platform records should be expanded to include recommendation, exposure, viewing duration, engagement quality, and cross-platform recirculation.

Finally, the analysis is bounded by China's professional award context and cannot be generalised directly to other media systems. Comparison with Malaysian, Southeast Asian, and other international media would test how multilingual societies, cultural proximity, and regional history alter translation and audience positioning. Generative artificial intelligence also requires attention: future studies should examine whether automated translation, subtitling, title generation, and audience profiling expand linguistic reach while flattening cultural complexity, and how editorial responsibility is redistributed among journalists, organisations, and algorithmic systems.

Final Statement

Moving from China stories to cross-cultural expression is neither the translation of an already finished Chinese text nor its placement on an overseas platform. It is the professional reorganisation of journalistic meaning. Cultural translation shapes how Chinese experience enters another cultural setting; framing shapes the route through which audiences understand it; audience positioning shapes the relationship between communicator and public; and platforms provide the technical and institutional conditions within which those choices operate.

The broader professional task is not to secure acceptance of a completed national image. It is to make Chinese experience visible, intelligible, discussable, and capable of entering a responsible relationship with the experience of others. Cross-cultural expression succeeds when journalistic truth, cultural specificity, audience intelligibility, and platform adaptation are held together rather than pursued as separate measures of international reach.

Ethics Approval and Consent to Participate

The study analysed publicly available documentary materials and did not involve human participants or identifiable private data. Ethics approval and consent to participate were therefore not applicable.

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