

A Study on English Translation of Allusions in *Xi Jinping: The Governance of China* from the Perspective of Adaptation Theory

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Abstract: The allusions cited in *Xi Jinping: The Governance of China* involve profound cultural connotations and wisdom related to traditional Chinese culture, history, and philosophy. This study aims to explore the English translation of these allusions in *Xi Jinping: The Governance of China* from the perspective of adaptation theory. By considering factors such as cultural differences, translation purposes, and dissemination effects, the adaptability of the translation work are enhanced. Maintaining the essence and emotional expression of the original allusions during the English translation process poses a challenge. Translators need to balance the original context and emotional nuances to ensure effective conveyance and reception of the allusions, thereby contributing to promoting Chinese culture globally and amplifying China's voice. The process of adaptation involves various aspects, including contextual relation adaptation, linguistic structure adaptation, and dynamic adaptation. This study conducted a statistical analysis of allusions in the text and studied three major types of allusions: poetry, classics, and idioms, using case analysis. Guided by the Adaptation Theory, it adopts translation strategies such as domestication and foreignization, as well as translation methods like literal and free translation, to analyze the transmission of cultural connotations in the English translation of allusions. The application of Adaptation Theory in the English translation of allusions makes readers realize that translation is not only the transformation of language and text but also the transmission of culture. Through these strategies, translators can achieve adaptation in the English translation of allusions, maintaining the cultural connotation and linguistic characteristics of the original text, and enabling the translation to be well disseminated and accepted in the target language and culture.

Keywords: The Adaptation Theory, English translation of allusions, *Xi Jinping: The Governance of China*.

1. Introduction

Since the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China (CPC), President Xi Jinping's speeches and related theoretical works have attracted widespread attention. The combination of vivid contemporary values of traditional culture, fully demonstrated cultural self-confidence and cultural soft power, formed a unique language style and discourse system. It is these classics, which have once again entered the public's vision that realized the creative transformation and innovative development of traditional culture. The use of allusions is one of the unique expression forms of Chinese language, which is well known for its implicit restraint, educational significance and rich cultural connotation. The translation of allusions is directly related to China's cultural communication in the text of political publicity, which will affect the image of China in the international community. The proper use of allusions is of great significance to promote the external exchanges of Chinese culture.

Under the guidance of the Adaptation Theory, this thesis intends to study the adaptation and influencing factors of allusion translation in *Xi Jinping: The Governance of China* from the following perspectives: contextual correlates of adaptability, structural objects of adaptability, dynamics of adaptability and salience of adaptability with the combination of qualitative analysis and case study. The author attempts to reveal the explanatory power of adaptation theory in allusions translation and its practical guiding significance in future translation activities.

As the main carrier and implementation form of

international communication at this stage, the foreign publicity translation of current political documents has a strategic role for us to "Tell Chinese stories and spread Chinese voices". At the same time, foreign publicity translation, as a cross-language communication activity, is restricted by factors such as culture, context, society. In terms of structural adaptation, when conforming to the vocabulary, the translator must understand both the original meaning and the connotation of the allusions, and to choose words that can express the deep meaning of the source. When conforming to the sentence, the translators should reorganize the sentences involved in allusions, and choose the sentence pattern that conforms to the language usage of the target language readers to express the meaning of the source. In order to achieve dynamic adaptation in the process of allusions, translators need to consider the above factors and consider the flexibility and variability of the language. In the consciousness of the translation process, the translator must consciously select the expression method suitable for both parties on the basis of understanding the language expression habits of the author and readers, and reproduce the true intention of the original text. Therefore, the reason why the English version of *Xi Jinping: The Governance of China* can be widely welcomed by Western readers is the translator's reasonable adaptation.

Adaptation theory is a linguistic theory proposed by Belgian professor Jef Verschueren in 1999. According to Verschueren, language use ultimately involves "a continuous process of choosing language, whether this choice is conscious or unconscious, and regardless of whether it is due to internal or external reasons" (Verschueren, 1999: 55-56). The ability of language users to make appropriate choices in

the process of language use is attributed to the three characteristics of language: variability, negotiability, and adaptability.

Allusion refers to references of ancient stories and words with a known origin in poetry and prose. The term “allusion” is interpreted as “an ancient story quoted in a poem or text and a word with a provenance” in *Cihai* (*Cihai* Editorial Committee, 2012: 275). There are three general sources of allusions. First, they come from folk stories, legends, folk customs, myths, famous events in history, or names of places. Second, they come from stories and characters in some history books or literary works. Third, stories, characters, rituals, etc. come from religious books such as Buddhist scriptures and Bibles.

In *Xi Jinping: The Governance of China*, President Xi Jinping adeptly uses allusions to connect traditional Chinese culture with contemporary realities, drawing on history to govern and educate. Translating allusions poses a challenge for translators because the profound cultural significance behind allusions is difficult to fully convey to the audience in the target language. The study of the English translation of allusions in *Xi Jinping: The Governance of China* is beneficial for inheriting and promoting Chinese traditional culture, facilitating international dissemination of Chinese culture, deepening understanding of Xi Jinping’s governance philosophy, and promoting cross-cultural communication and understanding.

The study of the English translation of allusions in *Xi Jinping: The Governance of China* primarily involves aspects such as cultural differences, translation purposes, and dissemination effects. It aims to promote cross-cultural communication and understanding, publicize Chinese traditional culture, deepen understanding and dissemination of Xi Jinping’s governance philosophy, and address the significant differences between Chinese and western cultures, including language, modes of thinking, and value systems. The perspective of adaptation theory in English translation

research aims to ensure that translated works better adapt to the acceptance habits and aesthetic standards of the target culture, while enhancing the readability and fluency of the translated text while maintaining the original meaning.

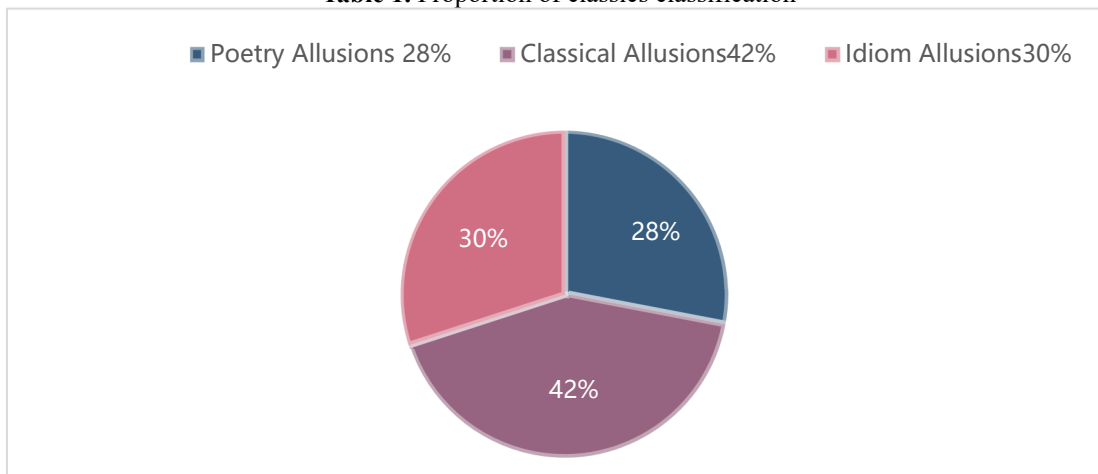
2. The Classification of Allusions in *Xi Jinping: The Governance of China* from the Perspective of Adaptation Theory

Using the theory of adaptation to translate *Xi Jinping: The Governance of China* allusions from poems, classics and idioms can accurately convey meaning, integrate into the English context, emphasize cultural significance and improve communicative effectiveness. These achievements will help disseminate Xi Jinping’s principles of governance to global audiences more effectively and influentially, and promote mutual understanding and appreciation across cultural boundaries. The translator effectively emphasized the cultural significance and emotional depth of the allusion through the use of adaptation theory. This emphasis preserves the cultural richness of the original text and enables readers to appreciate the profound insights and emotions conveyed by General Secretary Xi. The application of adaptation theory enhances the overall communicative effectiveness of the translation. By ensuring the accuracy, coherence and emotional resonance of allusion translations, translators can effectively convey Xi Jinping’s thoughts on governance to English readers and promote cross-cultural understanding and participation.

When selecting a translation strategy and method, it is essential to consider the context, characteristics, and purpose of the allusions to determine the most appropriate approach to ensure translation quality and effectiveness. The percentages of different types of allusions and their translation methods in poetry, classics, and idioms are as follows:

Poetry: 28% ; Classics: 42%; Idioms: 30%

Table 1. Proportion of classics classification



2.1. Poetry Allusions

The practice of incorporating classic phrases or stanzas from venerable poetry into written works or oratory enriches the literary quality of text, articulates deep emotions, and communicates complex ideas. This device not only refines the writing, making it more adept and engaging, but also adds layers of cultural significance, thereby enhancing the reader’s

enjoyment. Across different forms of linguistic expression, including academic research, artistic creation, and public speaking, the judicious use of poetic allusions enlivens the language and reflects the author’s erudition and appreciation of the literary canon.

In research, we can draw on the allusions in ancient Chinese poetry to enrich the expression and literary mood of the research, adding literary emotions and philosophical

connotations to the study, making it more storytelling and infectious. In the following analysis, I will analyze the poetry allusions in *Xi Jinping: The Governance of China* and its English translation.

Example 1:

ST: 不要夸人颜色好, 只留清气满乾坤。

TT: Do not praise others for their good looks, only keep the clear air full of the universe.

This sentence comes from *Ink Plum* written by Wang Mian. The meaning of this sentence not only focus on appearance, but to pay attention to a person's character and temperament. "颜色" here refers to the appearance, "清气" refers to the inner quality of purity, and "乾坤" refers to the entire world. During the translation process, "清气" was translated as "clear air", and "乾坤" was translated as "universe" to be more in line with English expression habits. From the perspective of adaptation theory, this translation successfully conveys the basic meaning of the original text, is basically faithful to the original in meaning, and adapts to the target language culture and readers' habits. It conveys the poet's emphasis on inner beauty.

Example 2:

ST: 黄沙百战穿金甲, 不破楼兰终不还。

TT: Through a hundred battles of yellow sand, the golden armor remains intact; until Loulan is conquered, I will not return.

This poem is from *Seven Poems on Joining the Army, Number Four* written by Wang Changling. The meaning of this sentence is that despite experiencing countless hardships, you are still persevering, vowing to overcome difficulties and never give up until you achieve your goals. In the original text, "楼兰" refers to a state in the Western Regions during the Han Dynasty, a term that evokes imagery of ancient borderlands and campaigns for readers familiar with Chinese culture. However, in the target language culture, there may not be a direct cultural equivalent. Therefore, the translator has used free translation to convey the meaning to the readers. In the process of translation, the translator has adjusted the structure of the original text, employing free translation, cultural adaptation, and linguistic accommodation to align with English expression habits.

These poems embody the profound heritage and wisdom of Chinese traditional culture, and have important enlightenment and guiding significance for leadership, governance and philosophy of life. President Xi Jinping's series of speeches draw on classics and references, and have a distinctive "Xi style". It covers a wide range of topics, including pre-Qin prose, hundreds of schools of thought, Tang and Song poetry, and Mao Zedong poetry. General Secretary Xi Jinping's quotations endow these poetry classics with contemporary value and political connotation, conveying the ideological content concisely.

2.2. Classical Allusions

Incorporating classical allusions within academic research, speeches, or various forms of discourse entails the strategic usage of references derived from ancient literary works and historical documents. To effectively utilize classical allusions, one must possess a thorough comprehension and expertise of the source materials, ensuring that the cited content accurately reflects the author's intent. Works that primarily rely on classical allusions for their expression demonstrate the author's reverence for and engagement with cultural heritage,

offering readers profound insights and enlightenment.

By quoting beautiful sentences or profound thoughts from classic books, the work can be endowed with broader cultural and philosophical connotations, making it easier for readers to understand and resonate with the author's thoughts and ideas. Below I will conduct a comparative study of the original work of *Xi Jinping: The Governance of China* and its English translation, and analyze the classic allusions in the translation with examples.

Example 3:

ST: 孟子云: 人皆有不忍人之心。

TT: Mencius said, "Everyone has a heart that cannot bear to see others suffer."

The meaning of "人皆有不忍人之心" is that everyone has compassion and consideration for others. The translation method of this sentence is literal translation. In this example sentence, every Chinese character and phrase in the original text has been accurately translated into English, retaining the original meaning and expression. This literal translation method can effectively convey the original author's intention while respecting the expression of the original text. This translation is an example of adapting to English expression habits, conveying the original meaning while conforming to English grammar and sentence structure. Mencius's thoughts are deeply rooted in Confucian culture, which may be less familiar to readers from Western cultural backgrounds. Therefore, the translation requires simplification or explanation of culture-specific terms to make them clearer and more understandable to the target language audience. Guided by the theory of adaptation, this translation successfully achieves adaptation in terms of linguistic structure, cultural differences, communicative purposes, and reader expectations, remaining faithful to the original text while being easily comprehensible to the target language readers.

Example 4:

ST: 《史记》中的“风樯动, 龙旗举。”

TT: "The wind moves the sail, and the dragon flag is raised," from the Records of the Grand Historian.

The meaning of this sentence can be understood as the praise of the emperor's demeanor. The translation method of this allusion is free translation, which maintains the poetic flavor and image of the original text and avoids literal translation or blunt translation. This kind of translation not only retains the image of the dragon flag and the wind-moving masts in the original text, but also allows readers to feel the magnificence and mystery of the imperial style. The "龙旗" is a symbol of Chinese culture, likely referring to the banner of the emperor. When translating, the translator needs to consider whether the target culture has similar or corresponding symbols, or whether it is necessary to explain the cultural significance of the "龙旗" so that readers in the target language can understand. Chinese sentence structures are often more concise and implicit, while English may require more information for clear expression. Therefore, the sentence structure may need to be adjusted during translation to better conform to English expression habits, retaining the original vivid language while adapting to English expression norms.

These classics and allusions reflect the values and principles of governance in traditional Chinese culture, embody the wisdom and moral concepts in ancient Chinese classics, and condense the wisdom and philosophy in

traditional Chinese culture. It has an important enlightenment and guidance role in leadership, governance and personal cultivation, has an important enlightenment and guidance role in leaders' thinking and behavior, and provides important reference for governing the country.

2.3. Idiom Allusions

The use of idioms in language effectively conveys the author's intention and enhances the literary elegance and expressiveness of a work. Idioms are typically employed to vividly describe things, express emotions, or evoke resonance. By referencing idioms, an author can encapsulate rich meanings and emotions in just a few words, making the work more vibrant and engaging, while also demonstrating the author's respect and understanding of Chinese cultural traditions.

Appropriate use of idioms can make the advertising language more personalized and creative, and improve the advertising effect. Below I will conduct a comparative study of *Xi Jinping: The Governance of China* and its English translation, and analyze the idioms and allusions in it with examples.

Example 5:

ST: 历史川流不息，精神代代相传。

TT: As time moves steadily forward, the spirit of the Party has been passed on from generation to generation.

The idiom “川流不息” originates from The Book of Songs. “川流不息” means (pedestrians, cars and horses, etc.) as continuous as water. Using the literal translation method, the translation is carried out on the basis of maintaining the structure and meaning of the original text, expressing the understanding of the spiritual inheritance of the party. When translating, the target language context and cultural background were taken into account. English readers might not be familiar with this Chinese idiom, so the translator chose a common English expression that conveys the idea of time continuously moving forward, making it easier for readers of the target language to understand. Considering that translation is a communicative activity within a constantly changing social and cultural environment, the translator needs to be flexible and dynamically select the translation strategy that best fits the target language culture and reader expectations. The translation method used here reflects the translator's dynamic adaptation in the translation process.

Example 6:

ST: 初心易得，始终难守。以史为鉴，可以知兴替。

TT: Our Party's founding mission is easy to define. Ensuring that we stay true to that mission is much more difficult. By learning from history, we can understand why powers rise and fall.

“以史为鉴” means using people and events in ancient times as a reference for people and events today. Positively and proactively admonish people to learn from historical experience and lessons so that they can better control themselves. From governing the country to self-cultivation, they should follow the right path and not take the wrong path. Using the translation method of free translation and choosing appropriate expressions for translation according to English language habits, it emphasizes the difficulty of keeping the original intention and the importance of understanding the rise and fall through history.

Idioms allusions are rich in life philosophy and inspiration, and have warning and education significance for future

generations. President Xi Jinping cited classics and gave these idioms and allusions the significance and value of the times. While promoting the excellent traditional Chinese culture, they expressed the central idea concisely, and served as a warning and education.

3. Literature Review

Xi Jinping: The Governance of China is a book published by the Foreign Language Press on September 28, 2014. It was jointly edited by the Publicity Department of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and relevant departments and units. The book includes speeches, talks, lectures, and question-and-answer sessions by President Xi Jinping from November 2012 to May 2022, along with photographs of his work and life during various periods. As the highest leader of the Chinese Communist Party and state, Xi Jinping has delivered numerous speeches, presenting many new ideas, viewpoints, and conclusions, addressing significant theoretical and practical issues in the development of the Party and the country under new historical conditions.

Since the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, President Xi Jinping has put forward a series of important propositions, presenting new ideas, viewpoints, and conclusions, addressing significant theoretical and practical issues in the development of the Party and the country under new historical conditions, and showcasing the governance philosophy. This vividly records the Party Central Committee with Comrade Xi Jinping at the core, facing the complex situation of a once-in-a-century change and the overlapping challenges of a once-in-a-century pandemic, coordinating both domestic and international situations, epidemic prevention and control, economic and social development, as well as development and security, and leading the entire Party and all the people of the country in the great practice of fully building a moderately prosperous society.

3.1. Previous Studies on Adaptation Theory

In 1987, Jef Verschueren, the Secretary-General of the International Pragmatics Association, first proposed the theory of linguistic adaptation. He pointed out that linguistic adaptation refers to the language adapting to the environment, the environment adapting to the language, or both mutually adapting to each other (Verschueren, 1999). He emphasized that successful communication is both a process and a result of adaptation, highlighting that language communication is essentially a continuous process of adaptation.

After its introduction in 1999, the theory of adaptation has sparked a wave of research among domestic scholars for over a decade. Scholars have applied this theory in various fields such as second language acquisition, code-switching, pragmatic ambiguity, and translation, leading to rapid development and deepening theoretical research. The combined applied research has also increased, encompassing a wide range of disciplines and fields, particularly in the study of foreign and Chinese language and literature.

The study of translation under the theory of adaptation started relatively late in China. In future research, it is important to focus on summarizing and critically reflecting on the experience of translation research guided by this theory, rather than being limited to the current limited research areas. To achieve in-depth development, it is necessary to truly apply the theory to practical translation work and attempt to establish a system and framework of adaptation theory based on the facts of the Chinese language, further promoting the

localization of adaptation theory research and enhancing the influence of adaptation research in international academic circles.

3.2. Previous Studies on English Translation of Allusions

The earliest records of allusions in China can be traced back to the Book of the Later Han. In English-speaking countries, the term “allusion” is often considered to correspond to the Chinese term “allusion.” Given the differences in the explanations of these two words in English and Chinese dictionaries, this project plans to understand “allusion” as “a story or words with a known origin quoted in written or oral communication, which may not indicate the source and origin, and mostly quotes the general meaning,

key words, and phrases.” in the Dictionary of Chinese Allusions (Dictionary Editing Committee, 2012). This standard will be used to select corresponding allusions for analysis.

This synthesis of studies on allusion translation through the lens of adaptation theory emphasizes the interplay of culture, context, and reader response. It underscores the translator’s role in balancing semantic faithfulness with formal equivalence, while also navigating the cultural nuances of the target audience. The research highlights the value of aligning translations with the original style of text and linguistic features to preserve the depth of allusions. Additionally, it acknowledges the evolving landscape of allusion studies, with emerging conceptual metaphor and integration theories offering new avenues for understanding the dynamic nature of allusion meanings.

Table 2. The trend of publishing papers on allusions translation

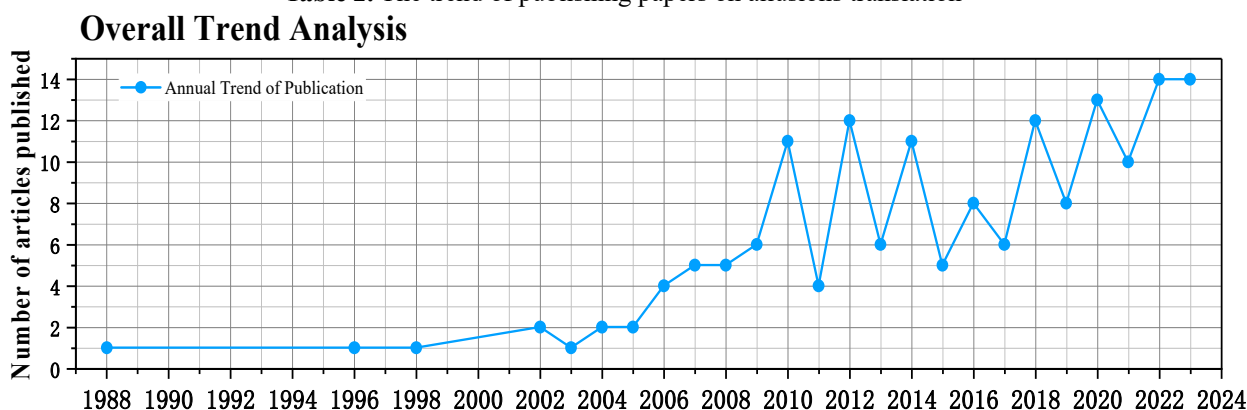
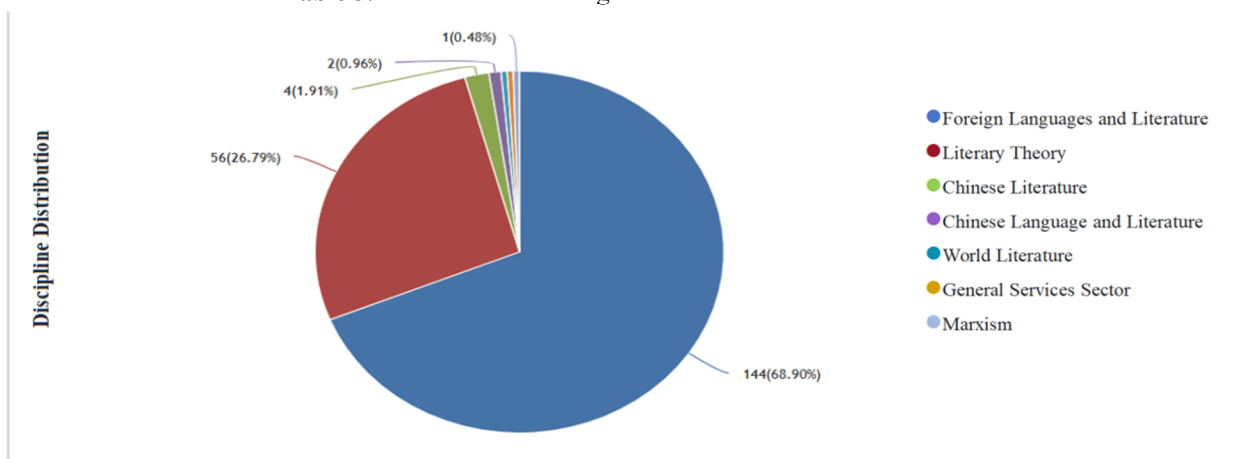


Table 3. Classification on English translation contents of allusions



3.3. Summary

In general, a great deal of studies of allusions translation has been made as early as last century, many of them are valuable and instructive researches. Adaptation theory is a significant linguistic theory that focuses on the linguistic choices and adaptations made by language users in the process of communication. It has garnered extensive attention from the linguistic community both domestically and internationally and has been applied to translation studies. This includes research at the lexical, syntactic, and discursive levels, as well as adaptations to the social, material, and psychological worlds. The theory not only considers the language itself but also the identity of the language user, their linguistic competence, and various social and psychological

factors during communication.

Although predecessors have achieved certain results in the study of adaptation theory and its English translation, there is still much room for further exploration. In the context of globalization, communication between different cultures is increasingly frequent, and how to better adapt to language use habits in different cultural backgrounds during translation is a topic worth studying in depth. With the development of technology and social changes, many new text types and fields have emerged, such as digital media, online language, and artificial intelligence. How to apply the Adaptation Theory effectively in these new fields is a challenge. In translation teaching, how to combine the theory and practice of adaptation theory to improve the effectiveness of translation teaching is an area worth exploring. Comparing

and combining adaptation theory with other translation theories may produce new research perspectives and methods.

Currently, research on adaptation theory mainly focuses on Chinese-to-English translation, and in the future, it could be expanded to the study of translation between other language pairs to explore the applicability of the Adaptation Theory in different languages and cultural contexts. While the application of adaptation theory in written translation research is extensive, there is relatively little research in the field of interpreting, which is an area worth further exploration. Through further exploration and research, we can not only enrich and develop the theoretical system of adaptation theory but also provide more comprehensive and effective guidance for translation practice.

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