

# **Exploring Nation Branding from a Translation Studies Perspective: Translational Insights in Soft Power Research with Special Reference to China's Belt and Road Initiative**

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The discipline of translation studies has contributed to international relations research, with linguistic-bound examples focusing on cultural exchanges. In China, specific translation research projects feed into its “走出去” (literally, “Going Out”) foreign policy, exploring how translation facilitates telling China's story. However, less explored is how translation studies can offer a conceptual framework for researching international affairs. To fill this gap, this thesis hopes to go beyond particular cases of linguistic exchange in international affairs and explore a more holistic approach to translation studies' contribution to international relations. To do so, the thesis inquires the core question of ‘How may a translation-informed interdisciplinary research agenda challenge or confirm existing concepts regarding culture, soft power, nation branding, and China?’

The question presupposes interdisciplinary research. Therefore, methodologically, the thesis is inspired by what Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (1987) propose as *rhizome* and what Tim Ingold (2007) conceptualises as *lines*. The method allows this thesis to follow various entangled lines of disciplinary knowledge in the way that “the ‘walk’ of the line retraces your own ‘walk’ through the terrain” (Ingold 2007, 84). As a result, a new ‘sketch map’ emerges, which, by gesturing with a metaphorical finger, allows readers to retrace their own walk.

Specifically, the thesis mainly takes a theoretical approach that revolves around translation, conceptualised by hermeneutics, semiotics, and object-oriented ontology. Chapter 1 focuses on defining a translation-centred culture, aiming to lay the foundation of the thesis. A translation-oriented definition of culture allows the construction of culture and intercultural communication to be reconceptualised in terms of semiotic translation. Building on this foundation, Chapter 2 illustrates the connections between translation and soft power and nation branding. While culture is sometimes regarded as an interchangeable term with soft power,

translation-oriented culture leads to translation-oriented soft power. A re-examination of the core concepts of soft power through translational insights may further reveal translation as an underlying yet unaddressed approach to the construction and function of soft power. A translation-centred revisiting of nation branding – the aim of which is seen as promoting soft power – serves a similar purpose. Chapter 3 further narrows down the research topic and critically analyses China’s nation branding campaign on the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). The chapter breaks down nation branding into three questions: ‘What is branded?’, ‘Who brands to whom?’, and ‘How to brand?’ The chapter indicates that the nation branding of the BRI is an example of eco-translation insofar as it is concerned with interpersonal, international, and human-environmental meaning-making and meaning-exchange processes.

The thesis demonstrates that translation is a hub for interdisciplinary dialogues. In this sense, translation should be seen as knowledge, a method, and a meta-discipline in addressing wicked problems – those problems for which “there is no agreement on exactly what the problem is, what its limits are, and what a solution would look like” (Hodge 2020, 23).

**KEYWORDS:** Belt and Road Initiative, interdisciplinarity, nation branding, semiotic translation, soft power.

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## 以翻译研究为视角探寻国家品牌塑造和传播： 通过“一带一路”倡议探讨以翻译为导向的软实力研究

传统国际关系研究中，翻译研究的主要角色是提供特定语言转换的实际案例和分析。在中国，翻译研究在软实力研究中主要服务于国家“走出去”战略，探讨如何用他国语言“讲好中国故事”。然而，少有研究将翻译研究作为概念框架分析国际事务。本论文希望探索翻译研究对国际关系的整体理论贡献，而非停留在语言转换案例上。为此，论文探讨的核心问题是：“翻译启示下的跨学科研究议程如何挑战或证实现有关于文化、软实力、国家形象塑造和中国的观念？”

回答该问题需要跨学科研究。因此，从方法论上讲，本论文受到 Gilles Deleuze 和 Félix Guattari (1987) 提出的根茎理论以及 Tim Ingold (2007) 的线条理论的启示。该方法使本论文能够顺着相互纠缠的学科知识线条顺藤摸瓜：正如 Ingold (2007, 84) 说的：“线条的‘行走’重现了你在地形中的‘行走’”。最终，一个新的“草图”浮现出来，通过隐喻的手指指引，让读者能够重新追溯他们追寻跨学科线条根茎式纠缠而行走的轨迹。

具体而言，本论文主要采用了以翻译为核心的理论方法，翻译这里指以解释学、符号学和物导向的本体论为中心的意义生成过程。论文第一章聚焦于定义以翻译为中心的文化概念，为论文奠定基础。以翻译为导向的文化定义意味着从符号翻译的角度，将文化建构和跨文化交流重新概念化。在此基础上，第二章阐述了翻译与软实力和国家形象塑造之间的联系。由于“文化”在有的研究与“软实力”可以等价替换，因此以翻译为导向的文化使得以翻译为导向的软实力成为可能。通过翻译视角重新审视软实力的核心概念，可以进一步揭示翻译作为构建和发挥软实力的一种潜在而未被充分关注的方法。以翻译为中心重新审视国家形象塑造（其目的促进软实力）具有类似的目的。第三章进一步缩小研究主题，以批判的视角讨论中国在“一带一路”倡议下的国家品牌打造。本章将国家品牌分解为三个问题：“品牌是什么？”；“谁塑造的品牌？面向谁？”；以及“品牌如何塑造和传播？”本章表明，“一带一路”倡议的国家品牌塑造和传播是生态翻译的一个例子，因为它涉及人际、国际以及人与环境之间的意义建构和意义交流过程。

本论文表明，翻译是跨学科对话的枢纽。从这个意义上说，翻译应被视为解决“刁钻问题”（wicked problem）的知识、方法和元学科。“刁钻问题”作为术语，是指“对问题的具体内容、界限以及解决方案的形式尚无共识”的问题（Hodge 2020，23）。

**关键词：**“一带一路”倡议，跨学科研究，国家品牌，符号翻译，软实力