

Translating national identities in the (political) diplomatic discourse between China and the West (1793-1867)

鄭馨念 ZHENG Xinnian

Jinan University

This proposal presents an interdisciplinary study that merges Descriptive Translation Studies (DTS) with a model adapted from the Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA). The aim is to shed light on the discursive construction of national identities in (political) diplomatic discourse between China and the West from 1792 to 1867. This period, marked by China's national identity crisis, offers insights into the pivotal role translations played in shaping identity and power dynamics. By examining the translation of national affiliations and address forms, the study delves into how Chinese and Western identities were constructed through translation. A notable discovery indicates that, before the Chinese national identity crisis, translators aligned with the Qing court frequently adhered to the norm of tributary discourse. However, during the identity crisis, there was a notable weakening of this norm, reflecting the shift in power dynamics between China and the West. This study stands out for several reasons: it augments the traditionally monolingual focus of DHA by weaving it into a bilingual DTS context, thus promoting a more synergistic relationship between the two fields. It also broadens the scope of TS concerning identity and power, emphasizing the need to scrutinize political discourses during intercultural confrontations. Importantly, this research sheds light on the translation history of 19th-century China, deepening our understanding of political discourse translation and its pivotal role in the construction of national identities.

Key words: national identity, power dynamics, political discourse, descriptive translation studies, discourse-historical approach, China, translation history, 19th century