

# Linguistic Landscape Translation in Huzhou: A Study from the Perspective of Functional Equivalence

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**Abstract:** As an important medium of intercultural communication, linguistic landscape translation plays a vital role in shaping urban image and promoting regional culture. Taking Huzhou as the research site, this study examines bilingual public signs from the perspective of Nida's Functional Equivalence Theory. Through field investigation and case analysis, it identifies major problems in informational, cultural, and response equivalence, such as inconsistent naming, unnatural or over-literal translation, insufficient cultural explanation, and limited audience awareness, all of which reduce the communicative effectiveness of public signage. The study argues that effective translation should go beyond literal reproduction and help target readers understand and use information appropriately in context. It therefore proposes improving translation standardization, optimizing culture-loaded expressions, strengthening audience-oriented information design, and establishing a review mechanism, in order to enhance Huzhou's linguistic landscape translation and provide reference for other Chinese cities.

**Keywords:** Linguistic Landscape Translation, Cultural Communication, Functional Equivalence, Cultural Accessibility.

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. Research Background

With the acceleration of globalization and urban internationalization, linguistic landscapes have become an important carrier of city image and intercultural communication. Linguistic landscape generally refers to visible language signs in public spaces, including road signs, shop signs, public notices, tourist information boards, and other written displays. These signs not only provide practical information for residents and visitors but also reflect the cultural identity, administrative capacity, and degree of international openness of a city.

In recent years, many Chinese cities have attached increasing importance to the translation of public signs and urban linguistic landscapes, especially in contexts such as tourism development, foreign exchange, and international events. As a historical and cultural city in Zhejiang Province, Huzhou is known for its rich ecological resources, silk culture, tea culture, and water-town heritage. With the continuous development of cultural tourism and the growing number of international visitors, the quality of linguistic landscape translation in Huzhou has become closely related to its urban image and cultural communication.

However, despite continuous efforts in urban modernization, the current translation of linguistic landscapes in Huzhou still shows various problems, such as inconsistent wording, grammatical mistakes, Chinglish expressions, and weak transmission of local cultural features. These deficiencies may lead to misunderstanding among foreign readers and reduce the effectiveness of external publicity. Therefore, it is necessary to examine Huzhou's linguistic landscape translation systematically and to explore practical strategies for improvement.

### 1.2. Research Purpose and Questions

This study aims to investigate the current situation of linguistic landscape translation in Huzhou and analyze its

major problems from the perspective of Functional Equivalence Theory. Instead of treating translation merely as a matter of linguistic correspondence, this study focuses on whether bilingual signs can enable target readers to obtain information clearly, understand local cultural references, and respond appropriately in specific public contexts.

Based on this objective, the study establishes a three-dimensional analytical framework consisting of informational equivalence, cultural equivalence, and response equivalence. Through the analysis of representative bilingual signs in Huzhou, the study seeks to identify major translation problems and explore how they weaken the realization of functional equivalence in public space. On this basis, practical suggestions are proposed to improve the city's bilingual linguistic landscape and enhance its role in public communication and cultural transmission.

This study is guided by the following research questions:

- (1) What are the major problems in the English translation of Huzhou's linguistic landscape?
- (2) In what ways do these problems reflect insufficient informational, cultural, and response equivalence?
- (3) How can Huzhou improve its linguistic landscape translation so as to achieve better functional equivalence in public communication and cultural representation?

### 1.3. Literature Review

The concept of linguistic landscape was first clearly proposed by Landry and Bourhis, who defined it as the visible display of language in public space, including road signs, commercial signs, public notices, and institutional name boards[1]. Their study showed that linguistic landscapes perform both informative and symbolic functions. Since then, linguistic landscape research has gradually expanded from issues of language visibility and identity to broader concerns such as multilingualism, urban culture, intercultural communication, and the social meanings embedded in public signage.

In international scholarship, linguistic landscape research has developed relatively rich theoretical and methodological

perspectives. In Chinese scholarship, however, research has more often focused on the translation, regulation, and practical use of public signs in specific contexts. As Chai Ting and Li Guidong point out[3], domestic studies on linguistic landscape have mainly concentrated on translation, public signage, and language standardization, while broader issues such as language policy, cultural identity, and cross-cultural communication have gradually attracted increasing attention[3]. Similarly, Tang Jing notes that domestic linguistic landscape research has developed rapidly in recent years and has formed both macro-level concerns, such as language policy and language management, and micro-level concerns, such as public-sign translation and multilingual display in urban space[10].

Existing studies show that translation problems in linguistic landscapes often involve not only linguistic errors such as misspelling, grammatical mistakes, naming inconsistency, and non-idiomatic expression, but also difficulties in rendering culture-loaded items and adapting information to target readers in specific contexts[7-9]. More recent studies have further emphasized the role of linguistic landscape translation in city-image construction, cultural representation, and international communication[4,5,12]. These studies suggest that linguistic landscape translation should be understood not merely as language transfer, but as a communicative practice combining informational clarity, cultural accessibility, and public usability.

At the same time, several review studies have pointed out clear limitations in existing domestic research. Zhang Baicheng observes that many studies place greater emphasis on description than on interpretation, and that theoretical construction and methodological exploration remain relatively weak[11]. Gao Shan and Fu Yi also argue[6] that current research still faces problems such as limited data sources, insufficiently detailed analysis, inadequate theoretical application, and a lack of diachronic investigation. In a similar vein, Tang Jing points out that domestic studies often remain at the level of identifying translation errors without sufficiently explaining the social, cultural, and policy-related factors behind language choice in public space[10].

These observations reveal several research gaps that are directly relevant to the present study. First, much of the literature focuses on major tourist cities, commercial centers, or famous scenic areas, while medium-sized historical and cultural cities such as Huzhou have received relatively less attention. Second, although many studies identify common translation problems, fewer adopt a unified theoretical framework to explain how these problems affect reader understanding and communicative effect. Third, existing studies on linguistic landscape translation in China still need to move further beyond error correction toward a more integrated discussion of language form, cultural representation, and audience response. Therefore, taking Huzhou as the research site, this study examines its linguistic landscape translation through the lens of Functional Equivalence Theory, with a focus on informational equivalence, cultural equivalence, and response equivalence.

## **2. Theoretical Framework**

### **2.1. Functional Equivalence Theory**

Functional Equivalence Theory was proposed by Eugene A. Nida[2]. It emphasizes that translation should not aim at

mechanical reproduction of the linguistic form of the source text, but at producing in target readers a response as close as possible to that of source readers. Compared with form-oriented translation, this theory pays greater attention to meaning, readability, comprehensibility, naturalness, and communicative effect. In other words, a successful translation is not simply one that corresponds formally to the source text, but one that functions effectively for its intended readers.

This theory is particularly suitable for the study of linguistic landscape translation. Bilingual signs in public space are highly functional texts whose main purposes are to inform, direct, identify, warn, explain, and promote. In most public contexts, readers are expected to understand key information quickly and use it immediately. Therefore, if a translation is formally close to the source text but sounds unnatural, fails to convey necessary information, or remains difficult for target readers to understand, it cannot be regarded as successful from the perspective of functional equivalence.

Functional Equivalence Theory is also applicable to the translation of culture-loaded expressions in linguistic landscapes. In a city like Huzhou, many public signs contain local cultural references, historical names, and traditional expressions. Their translation should not only preserve basic source meaning, but also make the cultural content intelligible to target readers. If the translated sign merely retains the source form while failing to communicate its cultural significance, its function remains incomplete. Therefore, linguistic landscape translation should be evaluated not only in terms of linguistic correctness, but also in terms of whether it enables effective understanding and appropriate reader response in actual public contexts.

### **2.2. Analytical Framework of the Present Study**

Based on Functional Equivalence Theory, this study establishes a three-dimensional analytical framework consisting of informational equivalence, cultural equivalence, and response equivalence. Informational equivalence refers to whether the English translation can accurately, clearly, and consistently convey the basic information of the source text. In the context of linguistic landscape translation, this dimension mainly concerns wording, grammar, naming consistency, standardization, and naturalness of expression. Since public signs are expected to provide quick and reliable information, informational equivalence forms the most basic requirement of translation quality.

Cultural equivalence refers to whether local cultural meanings embedded in the source text are effectively presented and understood by target readers. This dimension is especially relevant to the translation of culture-loaded items such as local products, historical references, traditional titles, and place names with strong cultural connotations. Cultural equivalence does not mean full formal preservation of the source expression; rather, it requires a balance between retaining local identity and making cultural meaning accessible to non-local readers.

Response equivalence concerns whether target readers can recognize, interpret, and use the translated sign appropriately in a specific public context. In linguistic landscape translation, quality cannot be judged only by whether a translation is correct at the linguistic level. More importantly, it should also be evaluated by whether it helps readers achieve the intended response, such as identifying a place, understanding a warning, following a direction, or grasping the significance of

a cultural site. Response equivalence therefore reflects the ultimate communicative effect of translation in public space.

These three dimensions are closely related. Informational equivalence provides the linguistic foundation, cultural equivalence strengthens the transmission of local meaning, and response equivalence reflects the actual communicative outcome. Together, they form the core analytical framework of this study and provide a clear theoretical bridge between Functional Equivalence Theory and the case analysis in the following chapters. The framework is summarized in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Analytical Framework of the Present Study

Dimension	Analytical Focus	Theoretical Support	Evaluation Criteria
Informational equivalence	wording, grammar, naming consistency, standardization, and clarity of information	Functional Equivalence Theory	accuracy, clarity, naturalness, consistency
Cultural equivalence	representation of local culture, culture-loaded terms, explanatory translation, and preservation of cultural meaning	Functional Equivalence Theory	cultural intelligibility, cultural retention, adequacy of explanation
Response equivalence	reader comprehension, contextual appropriateness, and practical function in public space	Functional Equivalence Theory	readability, functional effectiveness, usability

### 3. Problems in Huzhou's Linguistic Landscape Translation from the Perspective of Functional Equivalence

Based on the bilingual signs collected in Huzhou and

supplemented by online materials, this chapter analyzes the major problems in the city's linguistic landscape translation from the perspective of Functional Equivalence Theory. According to the analytical framework, the quality of linguistic landscape translation should be evaluated in terms of informational equivalence, cultural equivalence, and response equivalence. In other words, a translated sign should not only transmit basic information accurately, but also make local cultural meanings understandable and enable target readers to interpret and use the sign appropriately in context. As a historical and cultural city in Zhejiang Province, Huzhou possesses abundant local resources, including Hubi culture, silk culture, tea culture, ancient towns, and historical sites. These elements are widely represented in public signs, scenic-spot introductions, museum displays, and tourism-related texts. However, the collected materials indicate that some existing translations still fail to achieve adequate functional equivalence. The main problems are reflected in recurring tendencies such as incomplete explanation, mechanical transliteration, over-literal translation, unnatural expression, and naming inconsistency.

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To make the analysis more concrete, this study selects several representative cases from different types of linguistic landscape texts, including museum labels, scenic-site signs, cultural introductions, publicity texts, and historical street signs. As shown in Table 2, these cases illustrate how different translation problems may affect target readers' understanding, cultural recognition, and practical use of the information.

**Table 2.** Representative Cases of Huzhou's Linguistic Landscape Translation

No.	Chinese Sign	Existing/Observed English Translation	Location/Type	Problem Type	Suggested Revision
1	湖笔	writing brush	museum / cultural venue	cultural undertranslation	Hubi (Huzhou writing brush)
2	小莲庄	Xiaolianzhuang	scenic site	insufficient explanation	Xiaolianzhuang Garden
3	嘉业藏书楼	Jiaye Cangshulou	heritage site	transliteration without functional clarification	Jiaye Library / Jiaye Cangshulou Library
4	丝绸之府	literal version / awkward rendering	publicity text	unidiomatic cultural translation	a renowned city of silk
5	茶圣陆羽	literal title-plus-name translation	cultural introduction board	inadequate cultural explanation	Lu Yu, Sage of Tea
6	南浔古镇	Nanxun Ancient Town / Nanxun Old Town	tourist signage	naming inconsistency	Nanxun Ancient Town
7	衣裳街	Clothes Street	historical street sign	over-literal translation	Yishang Street / Yishang Historic Street

These cases show that the problems in Huzhou's linguistic landscape translation are not isolated or accidental. Rather, they reflect several recurring weaknesses in the realization of functional equivalence. Some translations convey only partial

information and fail to identify the referent clearly; some weaken or omit important cultural meanings; and others sound unnatural or inconsistent in actual public communication. The following sections will examine these

issues in detail from the three aspects of informational equivalence, cultural equivalence, and response equivalence.

### 3.1. Insufficient Informational Equivalence

One major problem in Huzhou's linguistic landscape translation is insufficient informational equivalence. From the perspective of Functional Equivalence Theory, public signs should present basic information accurately, clearly, and consistently so that target readers can understand the message quickly and reliably. However, some bilingual signs in Huzhou still show problems such as inconsistent naming, over-literal wording, and insufficiently natural English expression, which weaken the clarity and stability of information transmission.

A representative example is the translation of “南浔古镇,” which may appear as both “Nanxun Ancient Town” and “Nanxun Old Town” in different contexts. Although both versions are understandable, the coexistence of multiple translations reduces naming consistency and may confuse international visitors when they encounter the place name on guideboards, maps, tickets, brochures, or digital platforms. In terms of informational equivalence, a place name should ideally be translated in a stable and unified manner across contexts. Therefore, a standardized form such as “Nanxun Ancient Town” would better support identification and recognition.

A similar problem appears in the translation of “湖笔,” which may be rendered as “Hubi,” “Huzhou Writing Brush,” or simply “writing brush” in different settings. Such variation may seem acceptable at first glance, but it actually weakens terminological stability in the city's linguistic landscape. Target readers may not know whether these expressions refer to the same item or to different objects. As Sun Jianguang, Ma Mingyan and Li Zi point out[8], linguistic landscape translation in many Chinese cities often shows a tendency toward non-standardized expression and Chinglish-like transfer, which may impair public understanding and reduce the professionalism of the public language environment. The inconsistency observed in Huzhou reflects a similar problem.

Another example is “衣裳街,” which may be translated literally as “Clothes Street.” Although this version is lexically transparent, it sounds too plain and fails to function effectively as the name of a historic street. The translation conveys surface meaning but does not offer a sufficiently appropriate or recognizable name in English. A more suitable version such as “Yishang Street” or “Yishang Historic Street” would better preserve naming identity while also improving clarity and contextual appropriateness.

These examples show that informational equivalence requires more than simple lexical transfer; it requires clear, consistent, and contextually appropriate presentation of information. Beyond the accuracy of naming and wording, some signs in Huzhou also reveal problems in conveying local cultural meaning, which will be discussed in the next section.

### 3.2. Insufficient Cultural Equivalence

Another prominent problem lies in insufficient cultural equivalence. Functional Equivalence Theory emphasizes that translation should enable target readers to understand not only the referential meaning of the source text, but also its intended cultural significance where relevant. In Huzhou's linguistic landscape, however, some culture-loaded expressions are translated in ways that either overgeneralize local meaning or

provide too little explanation for international readers.

A typical example is “湖笔,” one of Huzhou's most representative cultural symbols. In some observed cases, it is translated simply as “writing brush.” Although this version indicates the object's general function, it fails to convey its local identity and cultural value as a traditional Huzhou craft. As a result, target readers may understand what kind of object it is, but they are unlikely to recognize its regional significance. A more effective translation such as “Hubi (Huzhou writing brush)” would better achieve cultural equivalence, because it retains the local term while also making its meaning accessible to non-Chinese readers.

A similar issue appears in the expression “丝绸之府,” which reflects Huzhou's historical reputation and silk culture. If translated too literally, the result may sound awkward in English and fail to convey the positive symbolic and promotional meaning of the original expression. In this case, the translation may preserve surface meaning but not the intended cultural image. A rendering such as “a renowned city of silk” or “the home of silk culture” is more likely to communicate the historical prestige associated with the expression and thus better realize cultural equivalence.

Another example concerns “茶圣陆羽.” If this phrase is translated mechanically, foreign readers may not understand why Lu Yu is culturally significant in the Chinese tea tradition. The source expression contains not only a proper name but also a culturally loaded honorific title. Therefore, a version such as “Lu Yu, Sage of Tea” is more effective, because it preserves the name while also clarifying his cultural identity. Studies on linguistic landscape translation have shown that culture-loaded terms often require more than literal translation if they are to be understood by international readers[5,7]. The Huzhou cases confirm this point.

These examples suggest that cultural equivalence is not achieved simply by preserving the external form of the source text. More importantly, the translation should help target readers recognize the cultural meaning, symbolic value, and local identity embedded in the original expression.

### 3.3. Insufficient Response Equivalence

A further problem concerns insufficient response equivalence. In Functional Equivalence Theory, the effect of translation is closely related to the response of the target reader. In the context of public signs, response equivalence means that international readers should be able to identify, understand, and use the translated message appropriately in a specific situation. If a translation preserves the source form but fails to support practical recognition or comprehension, then its communicative function remains incomplete.

A representative example is “小莲庄.” When a sign presents only “Xiaolianzhuang,” international visitors may recognize it as a proper noun, but they may still be unable to determine what kind of place it is. In other words, the translation retains the original name but does not provide enough information for the target reader to respond appropriately in context. A version such as “Xiaolianzhuang Garden” would better achieve response equivalence because it combines name retention with functional clarification.

A similar issue can be found in “嘉业藏书楼.” If it is translated only as “Jiaye Cangshulou,” the sign may preserve the source form, but it does not sufficiently indicate whether the site is a library, a heritage building, or another kind of attraction. In practical terms, the translation does not fully

support orientation or comprehension for non-local readers. A rendering such as “Jiaye Cangshulou Library” or “Jiaye Library” would better help international visitors identify the nature of the place and thus respond more effectively.

This problem also shows that the success of linguistic landscape translation depends on use context. As Sun Li points out[9], public signs perform different communicative functions such as indication, instruction, restriction, and introduction, so their translation should be guided by the needs of target readers and by the specific context of use. A short transliterated form may be acceptable on a map or in a logo, but on an entrance board, museum panel, or scenic-site introduction, additional explanation is often necessary. Therefore, response equivalence requires translators to consider not only what the source text says, but also how target readers are expected to use the information.

Overall, the problem of insufficient response equivalence in Huzhou’s linguistic landscape lies in the lack of adequate audience awareness. Some translations remain too source-text-oriented and do not fully take into account the informational needs, reading habits, and interpretive limitations of international visitors in real public settings.

### 3.4. Causes of the Problems

The above problems are related to several broader factors. First, Huzhou still appears to lack a sufficiently unified and localized translation standard for place names, cultural terms, and public bilingual signage. Because signs may be produced by different departments, museums, scenic areas, and commercial operators, inconsistent translations are likely to occur. Second, some bilingual signs may not undergo a strict review process before being put into use, which allows awkward wording, inconsistent naming, or inadequate explanation to remain in public space. Third, in some cases, translation work seems to focus more on superficial transfer from Chinese into English than on actual communicative effect, resulting in expressions that are formally close to the original but functionally weak. Finally, insufficient audience awareness also contributes to the problem, since some translations do not adequately consider the knowledge background and practical needs of international readers.

These problems are not unique to Huzhou. Review studies on domestic linguistic landscape research have repeatedly pointed out that public-sign translation in China is often affected by weak standardization, limited theoretical support, and insufficiently systematic management[6,10,11]. Zhang Baicheng notes that many domestic studies still emphasize surface description or error identification more than deeper interpretation, while Gao Shan and Fu Yi argue that linguistic landscape research in China often suffers from limited data sources, inadequate theoretical application, and insufficiently detailed analysis[6,11]. Tang Jing further points out that research on linguistic landscape in China frequently remains at the level of translation problems themselves and does not always fully explain the policy, cultural, and social factors behind public language use[10]. These observations help explain why problems such as inconsistency, over-literal translation, and weak audience orientation continue to appear in actual public signage.

In short, the problems in Huzhou’s linguistic landscape translation are not merely linguistic errors in a narrow sense. More fundamentally, they reflect shortcomings in the realization of informational equivalence, cultural equivalence, and response equivalence, as well as limitations in

standardization, review, and reader-oriented translation practice.

## 4. Suggestions for Improving Huzhou’s Linguistic Landscape Translation under Functional Equivalence

Based on the problems identified in Chapter Three, this chapter proposes several suggestions for improving Huzhou’s linguistic landscape translation from the perspective of Functional Equivalence Theory. Since bilingual signs in public space should not only transfer language but also support comprehension, orientation, and cultural communication, the improvement of translation should aim at enhancing informational equivalence, cultural equivalence, and response equivalence in an integrated way.

### 4.1. Promoting Standardization to Improve Informational Equivalence

To improve informational equivalence, Huzhou should strengthen the standardization of its linguistic landscape translation. A practical step is to establish a localized bilingual glossary for public signage, especially for place names, scenic spots, historical streets, museums, cultural institutions, and representative culture-specific terms. For each item, the glossary should provide a recommended standard translation and, where necessary, an extended explanatory version for use in introductions or interpretive panels.

Special attention should be given to high-frequency and culturally representative items such as “湖笔,” “南浔古镇,” “小莲庄,” “嘉业藏书楼,” and “衣裳街.” Once standard forms are determined, they should be applied consistently across different media, including physical signboards, tourist brochures, official websites, and digital navigation platforms. In this way, target readers can establish stable associations with names and terms, which is essential for informational equivalence.

In addition, the formulation and implementation of such standards should involve coordination among local government departments, scenic areas, museums, and language professionals. Only through unified management and cross-departmental cooperation can Huzhou reduce inconsistency and improve the clarity and reliability of its bilingual public information.

### 4.2. Optimizing the Translation of Culture-loaded Expressions to Enhance Cultural Equivalence

From the perspective of Functional Equivalence Theory, the translation of culture-specific expressions in Huzhou’s linguistic landscape should aim to make local cultural meanings understandable and accessible to target readers while preserving key elements of regional identity. In public signs, scenic-spot introductions, museum displays, and tourism-related texts, the effectiveness of translation depends not only on whether the original meaning is retained, but also on whether international readers can identify the referent, understand its cultural significance, and use the information appropriately in context. Therefore, the translation of culture-specific expressions should be guided more by communicative effect than by formal correspondence alone.

As a historical and cultural city in Zhejiang Province, Huzhou contains many culture-loaded expressions related to

Hubi culture, silk culture, tea culture, traditional streets, and historical sites. These expressions constitute important elements of the city's cultural image. However, if they are translated too literally, too generally, or without sufficient explanation, their cultural meanings may be weakened and their communicative value may be reduced. In this sense, functional equivalence requires translators to consider not only lexical meaning, but also the target readers' likely level of cultural knowledge and their actual informational needs in public settings.

In order to make the translation of cultural items more

targeted and systematic, it is necessary to adopt different strategies according to the type of expression and its communicative function. Some items emphasize local identity and therefore need to preserve their original form; others mainly serve promotional purposes and should be rendered in a way that is natural and effective in English. Based on these considerations, this study summarizes several suggested translation strategies for typical culture-specific expressions in Huzhou's linguistic landscape, as shown in Table 3.

**Table 3.** Suggested Translation Strategies for Culture-specific Expressions in Huzhou's Linguistic Landscape

Category	Examples	Suggested Strategy	Suggested Translation
Proper names	湖笔, 小莲庄	Transliteration + explanation	Hubi (Huzhou writing brush); Xiaolianzhuang Garden
Publicity expressions	丝绸之府	Free translation / functional equivalence	a renowned city of silk; the home of silk culture
Titles of historical figures	茶圣陆羽	Retention of proper name + identity explanation	Lu Yu, Sage of Tea
Historic streets / heritage sites	衣裳街, 嘉业藏书楼	Standardized name + functional description	Yishang Historic Street; Jiaye Cangshulou Library

The four categories listed in Table 3 correspond to four major communicative needs in Huzhou's linguistic landscape: identity preservation, promotional expression, cultural explanation, and practical guidance. For proper names such as “湖笔,” transliteration is useful for retaining local linguistic and cultural identity, but it should generally be accompanied by a brief explanation so that foreign readers can understand what the item refers to. Thus, the rendering “Hubi (Huzhou writing brush)” is more effective than either pure transliteration or an overly generalized translation, because it balances cultural preservation with reader comprehension.

Publicity expressions, by contrast, are more closely related to image construction and external communication. Their main purpose is not to reproduce the original wording, but to convey the intended cultural and promotional meaning in an acceptable and appealing way. Therefore, expressions such as “丝绸之府” are better translated through free translation or functional equivalence, for example, as “a renowned city of silk” or “the home of silk culture.” Such renderings are clearer and more natural for English readers, and they better reflect the communicative purpose of city-promotion discourse.

For titles of historical figures, the original personal name should usually be retained, while an explanatory element may be added to clarify the figure's cultural status. For instance, “茶圣陆羽” can be translated as “Lu Yu, Sage of Tea,” which preserves the historical figure's identity while also helping international readers understand his significance in Chinese tea culture. This strategy is especially effective in museum texts, memorial displays, and tourist introductions, where cultural information needs to be both concise and meaningful.

Historic streets and heritage sites, meanwhile, often require a relatively standardized English name together with functional description when necessary. This is because such expressions not only convey cultural heritage, but also serve practical purposes such as orientation, tourism guidance, and place identification. For example, “衣裳街” may be rendered as “Yishang Historic Street,” which indicates both the proper

name and the nature of the site. Likewise, “嘉业藏书楼” can be translated as “Jiaye Cangshulou Library,” allowing readers to recognize it as a cultural institution rather than simply a phonetic form. In contexts such as scenic guides or directional signs, this kind of translation can significantly improve readability and usability.

The table, therefore, does not merely list examples, but reflects a broader principle of functional equivalence: translation choices should vary according to text type, communicative purpose, and target readers' needs. In other words, no single method can be applied to all culture-specific expressions. Translators need to decide whether to prioritize identity retention, semantic clarity, promotional effect, or practical guidance, depending on the context in which the expression appears.

In addition, translators should take into account the knowledge gap between local readers and international audiences. Some expressions familiar to Chinese readers may be difficult for foreign visitors to understand without explanation. Names of historical figures, traditional products, or local sites often require more than direct translation. Therefore, the translation of culture-specific expressions should aim not only at linguistic transfer, but also at effective cultural presentation. When handled appropriately, the linguistic landscape can serve as an important medium through which Huzhou communicates its history and cultural identity to the outside world. In this way, the translation of culture-specific expressions can better achieve functional equivalence in both cultural representation and communicative effect.

### 4.3. Strengthening Audience-oriented Information Design to Improve Response Equivalence

To improve response equivalence, Huzhou should strengthen audience awareness in the design and translation of bilingual signs. Public signs are used in concrete settings, and their effectiveness depends on whether target readers can

identify and understand information quickly in relation to a specific practical purpose. Therefore, translators and sign designers should consider who the readers are, what they need to know, and how much information is necessary in each context.

In practice, this means that signs should be designed and translated according to text function and location. For example, signs at entrances, heritage sites, scenic introductions, and museum displays often require not only name translation but also basic functional clarification. A place name alone may be insufficient for foreign visitors if it does not indicate whether the place is a garden, a library, a temple, or a historic street. In such cases, brief explanatory support should be added to improve recognizability and practical usability.

At the same time, information density should be adjusted according to context. On maps or directional signs, concise forms may be preferable; on introduction boards, slightly fuller explanatory translation may be necessary. By optimizing the amount and type of information provided in different settings, Huzhou can better ensure that target readers respond to signs in ways similar to local readers, thereby improving response equivalence. By optimizing the amount and type of information provided in different settings, Huzhou can better ensure that target readers respond to signs in ways similar to local readers, thereby improving response equivalence. Such audience-oriented design helps bilingual signs fulfill their practical function more effectively in real public settings.

#### **4.4. Establishing a Review Mechanism to Ensure Functional Equivalence**

To ensure the realization of functional equivalence, Huzhou should establish a clearer and more workable review mechanism for bilingual public signage. Before a sign is installed, replaced, or updated, its English translation should ideally go through a three-step process: initial translation, professional review, and contextual verification. The professional review should be conducted by personnel with adequate English competence and some knowledge of public-sign translation and local culture. Contextual verification should check whether the translation fits the sign's actual location, function, layout, and target audience.

The review process should be guided by clear criteria rather than by general intuition alone. At minimum, reviewers should examine whether the translation achieves informational equivalence, cultural equivalence, and response equivalence. More specifically, they should check linguistic accuracy and consistency, adequacy of cultural explanation, readability, contextual appropriateness, and practical usability. Through such a review process, bilingual signs can be evaluated not only as language products but also as public communication tools.

In addition, important areas such as scenic spots, cultural venues, museums, and historic streets should be subject to periodic re-examination. A simple feedback mechanism may also be introduced so that problematic translations reported by visitors, staff, or researchers can be collected and revised in time. This would help transform translation management from one-time correction into continuous quality control. This mechanism should involve translators, English teachers, cultural experts, and site managers so that informational, cultural, and response equivalence can be jointly assessed. In this way, bilingual signs can be improved not only at the

linguistic level, but also at the level of communicative function and cultural representation.

#### **4.5. Summary**

In summary, the improvement of Huzhou's linguistic landscape translation should be guided by the goal of achieving functional equivalence in public space. More specifically, informational equivalence can be strengthened through standardization, cultural equivalence can be enhanced through more effective translation of culture-loaded expressions, and response equivalence can be improved through audience-oriented information design. These efforts should be further supported by a more systematic review and management mechanism. Through such coordinated measures, Huzhou can build a clearer, more professional, and more culturally meaningful bilingual public language environment, and can better present its local identity to domestic and international audiences.

### **5. Conclusion**

This study has examined Huzhou's linguistic landscape translation from the perspective of Functional Equivalence Theory. By analyzing representative bilingual signs collected from public spaces, tourist attractions, and cultural venues, the study finds that although Huzhou's bilingual signs generally fulfill basic informative functions, some translations still fail to achieve adequate functional equivalence. The main problems are reflected in three aspects: insufficient informational equivalence, insufficient cultural equivalence, and insufficient response equivalence. Specifically, problems such as inconsistent naming, unnatural or over-literal expression, insufficient cultural explanation, and limited audience awareness weaken the effectiveness of bilingual signs in information delivery, cultural representation, and public communication.

The study shows that linguistic landscape translation should not be treated merely as a matter of formal language transfer. Rather, it should be understood as a process of enabling target readers to understand, recognize, and use information in ways broadly comparable to source readers. For Huzhou, improving linguistic landscape translation requires coordinated efforts in standardization, translation of culture-loaded expressions, audience-oriented information design, and review mechanisms. Through these measures, the city can improve the quality of its bilingual public language environment and better communicate its local cultural identity.

This study also suggests that Functional Equivalence Theory provides a useful and practical framework for the analysis of linguistic landscape translation, especially in culturally rich medium-sized cities. Due to limitations in data scope and research conditions, this study mainly focuses on representative cases rather than a large-scale corpus. Future research may expand the data range, incorporate audience surveys or interviews, and conduct comparative studies across different cities. As some review studies on linguistic landscape research in China have noted, future work should also move beyond surface-level error correction and pay greater attention to theoretical refinement, contextual interpretation, and the broader relationship between public language, cultural identity, and urban communication. In this way, linguistic landscape translation research can contribute not only to translation practice, but also to the wider study of intercultural communication in public space.

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