Translation of Achieves Pertaining to the South China Sea Issue Guided by Skopos Theory: A Case Study of British Foreign Office Document "Territorial Disputes of China" (1974-FCO-21-1242)

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Abstract

Britain has historically maintained substantial strategic interests in the regions surrounding the South China Sea. Throughout the twentieth century, numerous British departments preserved extensive archives pertaining to the South China Sea issue. These documents serve as essential resources for the academic study of the South China Sea, offering significant historical and legal insights. The translation of British archives concerning the South China Sea issue fulfills not only academic objectives but also significant political and legal functions. Nevertheless, current practices frequently lack a coherent theoretical framework to inform strategic decision-making. This study employs Skopos Theory in the Chinese translation of the British Foreign Office document "Territorial Disputes of China" (1974-FCO-21-1242). It posits that such translation constitutes a purposeful cross-cultural endeavor aimed at providing precise historical sources, bolstering sovereignty claims, and adapting texts for Chinese academic discourse. Through a purpose-driven analysis of lexical, syntactic, and textual choices, the paper illustrates how Skopos Theory effectively guides translators in balancing historical accuracy, political nuance, and reader acceptance. The study concludes that a skopos-oriented approach offers a robust theoretical and practical framework for translating politically sensitive historical archives, with implications for analogous translation projects.

Keywords

translation, archives, South China Sea, Britain, Skopos theory

1. Introduction

The South China Sea, an extensive body of azure waters, functions not only as a vital international maritime corridor and a repository of resources but also as a strategic focal point affecting regional stability and great-power dynamics. Since the twentieth century, disputes over the sovereignty of islands and reefs and maritime rights in this region have evolved, characterized by a complex historical tapestry woven from colonial legacies, post-war order, and interpretations of international law. In this context, historical archives, as primary records capturing specific moments in time and space, become essential evidence for reconstructing historical truths and analyzing legal justifications. The United Kingdom, as a former colonial

power and significant third party with a profound historical presence and strategic interests in the South China Sea region, has accumulated a substantial collection of archives on the South China Sea issue throughout the long twentieth century through its Foreign Office, Commonwealth Office, and other agencies. These archives, from the perspective of an external observer, document the claims, conflicts, and diplomatic maneuvers of various parties across different periods, providing a unique and irreplaceable corpus of third-party historical sources for deconstructing the historical genesis of the disputes and evaluating the strength of various arguments.

The precise and systematic translation and introduction of these foreign-language archives into Chinese hold significance that extends beyond conventional documentary translation. This endeavor is not merely foundational academic work; it constitutes a serious academic-political practice that substantiates arguments for national sovereignty and territorial integrity and contributes to the construction of international discourse power. However, current translation practices and research concerning such archives predominantly remain at the level of experiential summaries and technical discussions. Although scholars have proposed valuable principles on specific issues such as the verification of proper nouns, restoration of historical context, and handling of linguistic style (e.g., Shi, 1999; Zhao, 1987), these discussions are often dispersed across translators' prefaces, annotations, or case-specific notes, lacking a cohesive theoretical framework to systematically elucidate the complex decision-making logic underlying the translation process. The translation process is frequently perceived as a passive pursuit of "historical objectivity", overlooking the translator's role as an active agent who strategically weighs and creatively negotiates among multiple, sometimes intertwined, purposes such as "conveying original information", "adhering to academic norms", and "serving the articulation of national positions".

The introduction of the functionalist Skopos Theory offers a robust theoretical framework to address this research bottleneck. The central tenet of this theory is the conceptualization of translation as a purposeful, functional cross-cultural communicative act, underscoring the principle that "the end justifies the means" (Vermeer, 2001). This perspective necessitates a departure from an exclusive focus on "literal fidelity" and instead encourages a thorough examination of the multidimensional network of purposes inherent in the translation practice of South China Sea archives. The primary objective is to furnish precise and reliable first-hand research materials for both domestic and international academia (informative function); concurrently, it inherently fulfills the discursive function of providing historical and legal substantiation for sovereignty claims and effectively articulating China's position in international academic and public opinion forums (operative function). The selection of translation strategies—from the translation of island names and the functional equivalence of legal terms, to the deconstruction and restructuring of complex sentences and the critical conversion of cultural presuppositions—should be guided and justified by these intended purposes.

Consequently, this paper seeks to utilize Skopos Theory as the theoretical framework to systematically examine and theoretically elaborate on the Chinese translation practice of the British Foreign Office archive "Territorial Disputes of China" (1974-FCO-21-1242). This study aims to transcend the mere enumeration of translation techniques in isolation, endeavoring instead to construct a "purpose-strategy-function" analytical model. It intends to address the following core questions: In the highly politically sensitive context of the South China Sea issue, what are the specific multiple purposes encountered when translating British third-party archives? How do these purposes concretely influence translation decisions at lexical, syntactic, and textual levels? What guiding principles can Skopos Theory offer for reconciling potential conflicts of purpose (e.g., between historical objectivity and political correctness)? Through an in-depth analysis of this case, this paper aspires to achieve a dual objective: theoretically, to demonstrate the explanatory power and applicability of Skopos Theory to the study of diplomatic archive translation as a special text type, thereby advancing related translation research from descriptive experience towards theoretical construction; practically, to distill a set of purpose-oriented translation strategies that combine academic rigor with political acuity, providing a methodological reference for subsequent translation practices of similar archives, and even for the translation of broader functional historical-political texts.

The structure of this paper is organized as follows: Section 2 (Literature Review) systematically delineates the current state and limitations of research concerning diplomatic archive translation and the

application of Skopos Theory, thereby clarifying the academic positioning of this study. Section 3 (Theoretical Framework) provides a detailed exposition of the core principles of Skopos Theory and its specific application model within this research. Section 4 (Case Analysis) employs this framework to conduct a purpose-driven, in-depth analysis of representative cases from translation practice, examining lexical, syntactic, and textual levels. Finally, Section 5 (Conclusion) summarizes the research findings, elucidates the guiding significance of Skopos Theory for the translation of South China Sea archives, and proposes directions for future research.

2. Literature Review

This section endeavors to examine the existing scholarly contributions pertinent to the theme of this study, concentrating on two principal areas: the practice and research of diplomatic archive translation, and the application and development of the functionalist Skopos Theory within translation studies. Through a comprehensive review of the extant literature, this analysis seeks to elucidate the characteristics and trends of current research. On this foundation, it aims to clarify the academic positioning and innovative value of this paper's examination of South China Sea archive translation through the lens of Skopos Theory.

An analysis of research concerning the translation of diplomatic archives indicates a progression from practical summarization to theoretical inquiry. As a distinct category of pragmatic text translation, diplomatic archive translation has traditionally depended on the experiential summaries of practitioners, with systematic theoretical research remaining relatively underdeveloped. The existing literature can be broadly divided into two categories.

The initial strand encompasses experiential summaries of translation principles and methodologies. Early research predominantly derived from the practical experiences of archivists or senior translators, concentrating on translation accuracy, fidelity, and the restoration of historical context. For instance, Zhao (1987) emphasized that the translation of historical archives should "preserve authenticity and maintain originality", adhering as closely as possible to the linguistic style of the original era and avoiding anachronisms. This perspective established the foundational principle of the historical dimension in archive translation. Xue (1999), drawing from the practical work of archive arrangement, differentiated between various translation forms such as complete translation, selective translation, edited translation, and title-only translation. This differentiation reflects an initial concept of flexibly selecting translation strategies based on the archive's value and intended use, already suggesting functional considerations.

At the level of translation techniques, Shi Weiwei (1999) emphasized the necessity for translators to possess a comprehensive understanding of word meanings, a familiarity with colloquialisms, and a strict adherence to established norms for translating proper nouns to prevent information distortion or misunderstanding resulting from free translation. Cai and Cong (2017) systematically identified nine prevalent errors in archive translation, including incorrect characters, omissions, grammatical errors, and improper appellations, and provided specific criteria for ensuring translation quality control. While these studies offer valuable operational guidelines for archive translation practice, their focus predominantly remains on the "correctness of language conversion", with insufficient consideration given to the communicative purposes, cultural-political factors, and reader reception inherent in the translation process.

The second strand comprises case studies that concentrate on specific types or collections of archival translations. With the advancement of various archival translation projects, research has emerged that focuses on translation within specific fields or archives from particular countries. Notable examples include Li's (2004) selected translation of British Foreign Office archives pertaining to China, Wang's (2016) translation and compilation of British archives on Tibetan affairs, and Tan's (2017) translation and introduction of French Foreign Ministry archives concerning the Spratly Islands. Additionally, Yang (2021) explores the Chinese translation of Foreign and Commonwealth Office Files on Territorial Disputes of China guided by Relevance Theory. These studies offer valuable parallel text references and frequently include discussions in their prefaces or notes regarding the background of the archives and the challenges encountered in translation, such as the verification of personal and geographical names and the handling of historical terms.

Despite their considerable historical significance, much of the existing research remains confined to the level of "translation introduction and difficulty explanation". These studies often lack a coherent theoretical framework to systematically elucidate the rationale behind translation decisions. Consequently, they fail to establish a profound connection between specific translation strategies and broader translation objectives, textual functions, and cultural-political contexts. While Yang's (2013) introduction to the British Foreign Office archive system offers valuable background for understanding the mechanisms of archive generation in this study, it does not address issues related to translation.

In conclusion, contemporary research on the translation of diplomatic archives has amassed substantial practical experience and established a consensus regarding the necessity for accuracy and historical fidelity. Nevertheless, the prevailing research paradigm is characterized by a preference for practice over theoretical exploration and a focus on individual cases rather than systematic analysis. This approach has not fully leveraged contemporary translation theories, particularly functionalist theories, to develop an analytical framework that can elucidate and guide the entire translation process, encompassing purpose analysis, strategy selection, and effect evaluation.

Concurrently, the functionalist Skopos Theory has transitioned from its theoretical underpinnings to extensive practical applications. Functionalist translation theory, particularly the Skopos Theory as proposed by Hans J. Vermeer, offers a robust framework for transcending the constraints of traditional equivalence theories.

Skopos Theory fundamentally posits that "the end justifies the means". Vermeer (2001) conceptualized translation as a deliberate cross-cultural communicative act and introduced three principal rules: skopos (purpose), coherence (intratextual), and fidelity (intertextual). The skopos rule dictates that the entire translation process is governed by the intended purpose of the translational action. Vermeer (2001) further elucidates that the selection of translation strategies is ultimately dependent on the fulfillment of the specific skopos. Concerning the coherence rule, it is stipulated that the target text must be comprehensible to its audience, considering their particular context, knowledge, and needs (Munday, 2016). Meanwhile, the fidelity rule, as highlighted by Bian (2008), emphasizes the importance of establishing intertextual coherence between the target text and the source text, thereby necessitating that the translation remains pertinent to the original. These three rules function within a defined hierarchy. As Munday (2016) articulates, the translator's foremost responsibility is to ensure that the target text accomplishes its intended purpose. Subsequently, the text must be internally coherent for its audience, with coherence to the source text being considered only thereafter.

Reiss's (2000) text typology established a foundational framework for the analysis of source text functions. She classified texts into three categories: informative, expressive, and operative, positing that the type of text significantly influences the methods of translation. Christiane Nord expanded upon this theory by introducing the "Loyalty Principle", which underscores the translator's duty to mediate between the interests of the initiator, the original author, and the target audience. In her work, *Text Analysis in Translation*, Nord (1991) provided a systematic tool for pre-translation analysis. Furthermore, Nord's (2007) exploration of the role of parallel texts in translator training and practice offers direct theoretical support for this study's utilization of parallel texts to fulfill translation objectives.

The relevance of Skopos Theory is particularly pronounced in the field of non-literary translation. Given its focus on the intentionality and functionality of translation activities, Skopos Theory is especially apt for informing both the practice and study of translating non-literary texts, including legal, scientific, journalistic, and commercial documents. The theory encourages scholars to concentrate on the intended function of the target text within its specific context, as well as the expectations of the audience and the requirements of the client. For example, in legal translation, emphasis is placed on maintaining terminological consistency and ensuring equivalence in legal force; in the translation and editing of news, the priority is on the acceptability of information and its communicative impact. These applications illustrate that Skopos Theory is adept at navigating the intricate interplay between linguistic norms, professional standards, and cultural adaptation in translation.

In recent years, scholars have increasingly incorporated Skopos Theory into the analysis of historical and political text translation. This theoretical framework is employed to examine how the translation of political speeches, official documents, and historical literature serves specific objectives, such as national image construction, foreign policy advocacy, or the contestation of historical narratives (e.g., He, 2021; Li, 2018). Such research begins to address the political dimensions of translation and the translator's subjectivity, acknowledging translation as a discursive practice rather than merely a linguistic activity. Nonetheless, the systematic application of Skopos Theory to the study of diplomatic historical archives—texts characterized by high informational value, professionalism, and political sensitivity—remains infrequent, particularly in the form of in-depth case studies that consider Chinese perspectives and academic requirements as the translation's purpose.

Synthesizing the review of these two fields reveals a distinct interdisciplinary research gap, which this study aims to address. First, a gap exists in theoretical application, as current translations of relevant historical archives often lack deep integration with modern theories like Skopos Theory, relying instead on experiential judgment. Second, there is a limitation in research depth, with many case studies prioritizing historical content introduction and technical summary over analyzing archive translation as a purposeful discursive practice within academic, legal, and geopolitical contexts. Third, a singularity of perspective is apparent, as few studies adequately examine how translators actively coordinate potentially conflicting purposes—such as historical objectivity, academic rigor, and national interest—when working with third-party archives involving sovereignty disputes.

Therefore, this study aims to address this gap by employing the functionalist Skopos Theory as a systematic framework to conduct a comprehensive analysis of the Chinese translation of British South China Sea archives. By re-evaluating specific translation strategies at lexical, syntactic, and textual levels through the lens of "translation purpose determinism", this research endeavors to construct a purpose-oriented analytical model for diplomatic archive translation. The study seeks to elucidate the complex network of purposes—academic, political, and cultural—underlying such translations, to demonstrate the efficacy of Skopos Theory in guiding the translation of politically sensitive texts and resolving fidelity-function conflicts, and ultimately, to provide a new, theoretically grounded yet practical paradigm for similar historical-political archive translation research. Consequently, applying a Skopos Theory perspective to South China Sea archive translation represents both a theoretical enhancement of existing practices and a significant expansion of the theory's application boundaries.

3.   Theoretical Framework: Functionalist Skopos Theory

The theoretical foundation of this study is rooted in the fundamental principles of Skopos Theory. Initially proposed by the German translation scholar Hans J. Vermeer in the late 1970s and subsequently refined by scholars such as Katharina Reiss and Christiane Nord, Skopos Theory constitutes the core of the functionalist school. It marks a significant departure from traditional equivalence-based theories by reconceptualizing translation as a purposeful cross-cultural communicative act. This paradigm shift underscores that the selection of translation strategy is fundamentally contingent upon the intended function of the target text within its specific cultural context.

At the core of this framework are three fundamental principles established by Vermeer. The primary principle is the Skopos Rule, which asserts that the act of translation is determined by its purpose, often encapsulated by the phrase "the end justifies the means". This principle contends that any translation is constrained by its intended function(s), necessitating the translator's strategic flexibility. The second principle is the Coherence Rule, which mandates that the target text must achieve "intratextual coherence". It should be readable, acceptable, and meaningful within the cultural context of the target audience. The third principle is the Fidelity Rule, which requires a degree of "intertextual coherence" or correspondence with the source text. Importantly, Skopos Theory posits that the degree and form of this fidelity are themselves governed by the translation's purpose and the translator's interpretation, thus moving beyond rigid, literal notions of faithfulness. Additionally, this theoretical framework is augmented by Nord's "Loyalty Principle", which introduces an ethical dimension by emphasizing the translator's responsibility to mediate between the interests of the source text author, the target readers, and the translation's own purpose.The applicability of

Skopos Theory to the translation of British South China Sea archives is both evident and compelling, as this task exemplifies functional text translation with clearly defined, multiple objectives. The theory's focus on purpose makes it an ideal guiding framework.

The applicability of the translation is primarily derived from its multi-dimensional purposes. The translation fulfills not a singular, but a network of interconnected objectives: an academic research purpose aimed at providing accurate and traceable third-party historical documents; a legal evidence purpose intended to construct a historical and legal evidence chain supporting sovereignty claims; a political discourse purpose designed to enhance the credibility and persuasiveness of China's position in international discourse; and a cultural heritage purpose to uphold China's historical narrative and naming rights during the translation process, thereby reinforcing cultural subjectivity.

Moreover, the applicability is elucidated through the text type and functional positioning of the archives. According to Reiss's (2000) typology, British diplomatic archives are classified as hybrid texts, characterized by both a predominant informative function (objectively documenting events, exchanges, and positions) and a simultaneous operative function (implicitly conveying political stances and aiming to influence perception). Translating such texts necessitates not only the faithful transfer of information but also a critical awareness of their ideological foundations and a strategic effort to align the translation's function with the requirements of the target context.

Skopos Theory offers a systematic, phase-based framework for guiding the entire translation process. This structured methodology commences with a comprehensive pre-translation analysis phase. Informed by the theory, this phase entails the development of a detailed "translation brief", which includes: the clarification of purposes to define primary and secondary functions; target reader analysis to identify various audience groups and their backgrounds; text function positioning to examine the source text's features and anticipate adaptation needs; and the collection of parallel texts from the target culture to establish references for normative expression and cultural conventions.

This preparatory work directly informs the phase of translation strategy selection, wherein the Skopos Rule actively guides decision-making. Key strategies include: the management of terms and proper nouns through a "verification + standardization" approach, prioritizing official Chinese names for terms linked to sovereignty; syntactic restructuring to adapt English complex structures to the paratactic flow and reading habits of Chinese audiences; and textual structural adjustment to align the format and layout with the norms of Chinese diplomatic archives, thereby enhancing professional acceptability.

The process culminates in a deliberate post-translation evaluation phase, guided by the Coherence and Loyalty Principles. This phase encompasses an internal assessment of the target text's coherence, readability, and adherence to professional norms within the target culture; an external assessment to ascertain whether the predetermined objectives (e.g., utility in academic citation or legal argumentation) have been achieved; and an ethical reflection on whether the translation has appropriately navigated tensions (e.g., between historical objectivity and political stance) while maintaining a balance of loyalty to the source author, the target audience, and the translation's own skopos.

The significance of employing Skopos Theory in this research is multifaceted. Firstly, it serves as a systematic analytical tool, integrating disparate translation strategies under the unifying logic of purpose realization, thereby enhancing theoretical awareness. Secondly, it underscores the political dimension of translation by explicitly acknowledging and providing a framework to rationally address issues of sovereignty stance and historical narrative. Thirdly, it fortifies process methodology by framing pre-translation preparation, strategy selection, and quality assessment as coherent, interconnected stages of a single translation action. Finally, it broadens the application value of the research, offering a transferable theoretical and methodological paradigm not only for archive translation but also for the translation of similar functional text types, such as legal documents and diplomatic correspondence.

Through a Skopos-theoretic reinterpretation, the translation of South China Sea archives is transformed from a mere linguistic conversion technique into a strategic discursive practice with distinct political, academic, and cultural objectives. In this context, the translators assume multiple active roles, including those of researcher, cultural mediator, and advocate for national interests. Each decision made in the

translation process ultimately contributes to the broader construction of historical understanding and the shaping of international discourse power.

4. Case Analysis

This section will examine the principal and complex issues encountered in translation practice within the framework of Skopos Theory. According to its fundamental principles, each translation decision should align with the intended function(s) of the target text. In this study, the primary objectives of translation can be summarized as follows: providing accurate historical materials for academic research, supplying third-party evidence for sovereignty argumentation, and ensuring the professionalism and readability of the text within the Chinese context. The analysis will proceed from lexical, syntactic, and textual levels, following the analytical path of "Translation Purpose – Strategy Selection – Function Realization Analysis".

4.1 Purpose-driven Conversion at the Lexical Level

Diplomatic archives encompass a substantial volume of terminology with distinct political and academic functions. The translation of these documents must primarily fulfill the dual objectives of ensuring informational precision and articulating a clear stance on sovereignty.

4.1.1 Translation of Proper Nouns

In the practice of translation, proper nouns are classified into four categories: geographical names, personal names, book titles, and titles of organizations, conferences, and treaties. Emphasis is placed on translation methods that involve "adopting the established popular translated names" and utilizing back translation through textual research to align with the cognitive context of the translation receptor. Furthermore, transliteration and annotation are employed to convey the pragmatic meaning of words, particularly through the combined use of these methods for translating island names.

Geographical names, or toponyms, which are prevalent in the source text, can be classified into three categories from a linguistic perspective: international common English names, transliterated Chinese names in English, and Vietnamese names (see Table 1 for examples). According to geographical attributes, these names can be categorized into human settlements and physical features. In this subsection, the authors specifically focus on the names of administrative units within the former category and island names within the latter.

Table 1: Example of Three Main Varieties of Geographical Names

Variety	Example		
International Common English Name	Paracel Islands	Spratly Islands	North Island
Transliterated Chinese Name in English	Hsisha Islands	Nansha Islands	Bei Dao
Vietnamese Name	Hoang Sa Islands	Truong Sa Islands	Dao Bac

The authors predominantly employed the names of administrative units from the source text as keywords for conducting searches on Bing. When these searches produced a significant number of highly pertinent and nearly identical results in Chinese, the authors were inclined to adopt the established popular translated names. Conversely, in instances where search results were sparse or nonexistent, the authors preferred to utilize transliteration to remain as faithful to the source text as possible and to avoid misleading the intended audience.

Example 1: Under Viet-Nam's first Republic, the President of the Republic on 13 July 1961 issued Decree No.-174-NK, making the Hang-Sa archipelago a part of the <u>province of Quang-Nam</u> instead of <u>Thua-Thien province</u>, and established the <u>village of Dinh-Hai</u> as part of the <u>district of Hoa-Vang</u>.

Initial Translation: 在越南第一共和国时期，1961年7月13日，共和国总统颁布第174-NK号令，将承天省的黄沙群岛划入广南省（Quang-Nam），并且在华旺郡（district of Hoa-Vang）设立定海乡（village of Dinh-Hai）。

Revised Translation: 在越南第一共和国时期，共和国总统ᵃ于1961年7月13日颁布第174-NK号总统令，将黄沙群岛（Hang-Sa archipelago）由承天省改划入广南省（Quang-Nam），并且在和旺县（district of Hoa-Vang）设立亭海村（village of Dinh-Hai）。

ᵃ 即时任越南第一共和国总统吴廷琰（Ngo Dinh Diem）。（译者注）

Translation Purpose: To ensure that the rendering of proper nouns, including geographical names, personal names, and institutional names, adheres to principles of political correctness, academic traceability, and cultural consistency within the Chinese context.

Strategy Selection: Implementing a "verification-first, authoritative-reference" approach. This involves prioritizing the use of official Chinese standard translations or academically recognized renderings. For names that are subject to disputes or have multiple representations, background information will be provided through annotations.

This example, derived from a Vietnamese diplomatic note, exemplifies a purpose-driven translation process. Initially, transliteration was employed for administrative names such as "Hoa-Vang" and "Dinh-Hai". However, to fulfill the dual objectives of diplomatic precision and accessibility for the target audience, the strategy transitioned to adopting established Chinese translations. Online searches utilizing Vietnamese keywords verified the standard names for provinces (e.g., Quang-Nam). For the district and village, further investigation using the decree's date and number uncovered commonly used Chinese equivalents ("和旺" and "亭海"). Additionally, translating the administrative terms "district" and "village" necessitated contextual adaptation. Initially rendered using Chinese equivalents ("郡" and "乡"), these were subsequently revised based on research into South Vietnam's historical administrative structure (Shu, 2012). Consultation of Chinese-language sources and Vietnamese dictionaries resulted in the accurate correspondents "县" (district) and "村" (village), ensuring the translation accurately reflected both the context of the source text and the linguistic norms of the target audience.

Example 2: On 20 January 1974, Communist Chinese warplanes which had been overflying in the area on precious days joined the action and bombarded Viet-Namese positions on the islands of Hoang-Sa (Paracels), Cam-Tuyen (Robert) and Vinh-Lac (Money).

Initial Translation: 1974年1月20日，早先飞越过该地区上空的共产党中国的军用机加入行动，轰炸黄沙群岛（帕拉塞尔群岛）、甘泉岛（罗伯特岛）和永乐岛（莫尼岛）上的越南驻地。

Revised Translation: 1974年1月20日，早前曾飞越该地区上空的共产党中国的军用机加入行动，轰炸黄沙群岛（Hoang-Sa，帕拉塞尔群岛（Paracel Islands），即西沙群岛）、甘泉岛（Cam-Tuyen，罗伯特岛（Robert Island），即甘泉岛）ᵃ和永乐岛（Vinh-Lac，莫尼岛（Money Island），即金银岛）上的越南驻地。

ᵃ 此处中越岛屿名称一致，中国甘泉岛于1947年得名，越南甘泉岛于1974年得名。（译者注）

Translation Purpose: To furnish precise historical documentation for academic research, to uphold China's sovereignty claims by explicitly asserting its official nomenclature, and to mitigate reader confusion by elucidating the relationship between Vietnamese, English, and Chinese toponyms within a contested context.

Strategy Selection: To achieve these objectives, a compensatory multi-naming strategy, supplemented by explanatory annotation, was implemented. Rather than employing simple transliteration, the revised translation presents each island name in a composite format: Vietnamese name (original romanization) + English name + Chinese standard name. This is followed by a translator's note that provides historical context for the coinciding Vietnamese and Chinese names.

Example 2 is derived from the document titled "Letter dated 20 January 1974 from the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Viet-Nam addressed to the President of the Security Council", which is a circulated document of the Security Council. The terms "Hoang-Sa", "Cam-Tuyen", and "Vinh-Lac" are Vietnamese expressions rendered in English, followed by their internationally recognized English names in

brackets. In the initial translation, the authors employed the transliteration method, a customary practice for translating geographical terms globally, to render these as "黄沙群岛", "甘泉岛", and "永乐岛", with their English names transliterated as "帕拉塞尔群岛", "罗伯特岛", and "莫尼岛", respectively. However, this approach presents several challenges. Firstly, the absence of the corresponding original names of the islands may inconvenience readers seeking related materials or information. Secondly, the omission of China's current official standard names may suggest that China has not designated names for these islands. This is not conducive to safeguarding China's sovereignty, given the internationally recognized principle of "Naming Based on the Ideas of Native People". Lastly, when Vietnamese island names coincide with Chinese ones, the lack of explanations could lead to reader confusion. Including translator's notes would alleviate the readers' burden and support research related to sovereignty issues. This approach ensures fidelity to the source text, reinforces China's official naming rights, and provides the necessary scholarly context to avoid ambiguity. In the translation practice, the contrast table of Chinese and foreign geographical names of the South China Sea islands, as summarized by Han (1988), along with the *Manual of transformation of English personal names* (Name Translation Office of the Xinhua News Agency, 2013) and online encyclopedias, were employed.

4.1.2 Translation of Professional Terms

In this subsection, the authors focus on the translation of three categories of professional terminology: telegram terms, military terms, and legal terms, emphasizing the importance of standardization and consistency in translation.

First, regarding telegram terms, each telegram follows a fundamentally identical format, ensuring that consistent translation does not result in ambiguity or contradiction within contexts. Most telegrams commence with a security classification, which can be categorized as top secret, secret, confidential, restricted, and unclassified. In practice, there are fixed expressions, namely "绝密级", "秘密级", "机密级", "限制级", and "无密级", used in the introduction of information based on the target sensitivity. Among these five security classifications, only "Confidential" frequently appears in the source text, and the authors consistently translated it as "机密级".

Second, military actions in the source text involve military terms in the source text.

Example 3: There has been a large build-up of Chinese aircraft on Hainan Island and in south China, but Chinese intentions are not clear. The Spratlys are beyond the range of their fighter aircraft, and only just within operating range of their bombers.

Initial Translation: 大量的中国飞机在海南岛和华南地区集结，但是其意图尚不明确。斯普拉特利群岛地处中方战斗机射程范围之外，仅在其轰炸机射程范围以内。

Revised Translation: 中国飞机在海南岛和华南地区大量集结，但中国的意图尚未可知。斯普拉特利群岛（Spratlys，即南沙群岛）在中方歼击机射程范围之外，仅在轰炸机射程范围之内。

Translation Purpose: To ensure that terms in fields such as law, military, and diplomacy possess equivalent professional function and standardized form in the target context.

Strategy Selection: Implementing the strategies of "functional equivalence" and "systematic unification". Emphasizing the use of standard translations within the professional domain of the target language; for terms lacking direct equivalents, achieving functional transfer through paraphrasing or annotation.

Example 3 examines two categories of military aircraft, specifically "fighter aircraft" and "bomber", as well as the term "build-up". The primary objective of this example is to accurately and professionally translate these fundamental classifications of military aircraft, along with the military term, into Chinese, with particular emphasis on terminological expression. Initially, the authors translated "fighter aircraft" as "战斗机" in a literal sense. However, given its selection from the "Letter from the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Viet-Nam addressed to the President of the Security Council" as an official Security Council document, the authors proposed that translating it as "歼击机" may better align with the professional expression style typical of formal diplomatic texts, compared to "战斗机". Online sources

indicate that "歼击机" is also recognized as "战斗机" in various encyclopedia entries, and "歼击机" represents the Chinese expression pattern for classifying military aircraft by use. Based on this rationale, the authors revise the translation of "fighter aircraft" to "歼击机", thereby maintaining a rigorous and professional wording style that facilitates the audience's comprehension of the source text's context.

Thirdly, in addressing the translation of legal terms such as "territorial acquisition" and "effective occupation", the authors utilized the metaphrase method. This method is selected due to the association of these legal terms with territorial disputes and their straightforward word structure. Dong (2011) posits that legal terms are characterized by specialization, exclusivity, conservatism, and authoritativeness. The authors argued that the meaning of legal terms is shaped not only by linguistic factors but also by the legal culture of different countries. In translating English legal terms, the authors initially sought completely or partially corresponding legal terms in the target language, rather than arbitrarily creating new terms, to prevent ambiguity and errors in translation. This approach is intended to reduce the audience's comprehension burden and facilitate the identification of optimal relevance. Furthermore, the authors provided explanatory footnotes to supplement details, referencing related CNKI papers. Regarding Latin legal terms, such as "res nullius" and "locus standi", the authors translate them into "无主之地" and "参加权", respectively, and include explanatory footnotes to clarify their meanings, in accordance with the Free Dictionary and Merriam-Webster.

4.1.3 Translation of Abbreviations

In this subsection, the authors categorize the abbreviations identified in the source text into two distinct types: acronyms and cablese. English acronyms are noted for their conciseness, which facilitates a reduction in the syllables necessary to convey the meaning of a word. This characteristic aligns with the telegraphic text's feature of delivering substantial content with minimal syllables. The authors present several examples of these abbreviations from the source text in Table 2.

Table 2: Categories and Examples of Acronyms

Category	Example	English Full Name	Translation
Organization	SEATO	Southeast Asia Treaty Organization	东南亚条约组织
	NCNA	New China News Agency	新华通讯社
	ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross	国际红十字委员会
British Department	FCO	Foreign Commonwealth Office	外交与联邦事务部
	SEAD	South East Asian Department	东南亚司
	FED	Far Eastern Department	远东司
Military Term	NLF	National Liberation Front	越南南方民族解放阵线
	RAF	Royal Air Force	英国皇家空军

Example 4:

Source Text: FED

Target Text:（英国外交部）远东司（Far Eastern Department）

Translation Purpose: To eliminate potential ambiguity caused by abbreviations and ensure the clear reference and identity recognition of entities such as institutions and organizations.

Strategy Selection: Adopting a "full-form restoration + context verification" strategy. Providing the full translated form upon first occurrence, possibly using the abbreviated form subsequently; verifying ambiguous abbreviations through archive numbers and context.

Drawing upon the archive number (the FCO-21 series pertains to the Far East), contextual evidence (nearly all telegrams were directed to FED), and related research (Liu, 2019), the translators deduced that the reference was to the United Kingdom's Foreign Office "Far Eastern Department" rather than the United States' "Federal Bureau of Investigation". This approach ensures precision in historical archives, thereby preventing reader misunderstanding or research deviation due to mistranslation.

4.2   Purpose-driven Restructuring at the Syntactic Level

Structures frequently encountered in English archives, including complex sentences, passive voice, and elliptical sentences, require adaptation to align with Chinese expression conventions. The primary objective is to ensure the clear transmission of information and maintain logical coherence and readability.

4.2.1   Handling Complex Sentences

Liu (2012) delineates a six-step methodology for translating complex sentences, which encompasses compressing the sentence trunk, discerning word meanings, distinguishing main clauses from subordinate clauses, clarifying sentence hierarchy, adjusting collocation, and refining word choice. The initial four steps are associated with the comprehension phase, whereas the final two pertain to the expression phase. The intricate sentences in the source text are characterized by the presence of attributive and adverbial clauses.

Example 5: <u>Concurrent with their armed intrusion into Chinese territory</u>, the Saigon authorities, using the tactic of "<u>the guilty party filling the suit first</u>", fabricated the lie about China's "sudden challenge" to their alleged sovereignty over Hsisha Islands in an attempt to confuse public opinion and even asserted <u>that</u> Saigon had full "sovereignty" over Hsisha Islands and <u>that</u> none amongst the countries participating in the 1951 San Francisco Conference raised any objection to their claim of sovereignty.

Initial Translation: <u>在武装入侵中国领土的同时</u>，使用"<u>有罪方先起诉</u>"策略的西贡当局，编造谎言称中国"突然挑战"西贡当局所谓的西沙群岛主权的，试图混淆公众舆论，甚至声称西贡拥有西沙群岛的完全"主权"，并且参加一九五一年旧金山会议的所有国家均未提出异议。

Revised Translation: <u>西贡当局在武装入侵我国领土的同时</u>，采取了"<u>恶人先告状</u>"的策略，编造了中国"突然挑衅"其所谓的西沙群岛主权的谎言，企图混淆公众舆论，甚至断言称，西贡拥有西沙群岛的完全"主权"，并且在一九五一年旧金山会议上，所有与会国家均未对西贡政府的主权主张提出异议。

Translation Purpose: To convert English hypotactic structures into a Chinese paratactic style, thereby ensuring the completeness, coherence, and comprehensibility of information conveyed in long sentences.

Strategy Selection: Implementing a strategy of "main clause extraction – layered narration – logic explication". This involves deconstructing main and subordinate clauses and reorganizing them according to Chinese temporal or logical sequences, while incorporating connectives to elucidate implicit relationships.

The translation disassembles the accompanying adverbial phrase, participial phrase, and parallel object clauses into a series of concise sentences that align with the rhythm of Chinese narrative style. The translation of "the guilty party filing the suit first" into the Chinese idiom "恶人先告状" not only facilitates cultural adaptation by employing expressions familiar to readers but also enhances the critical tone, thereby supporting the political objective of the archive as evidence for China's stance. Additionally, Example 5 originates from the back translation of the "Statement of Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China" in English. The authors identified its corresponding original Chinese text in the People's Daily, dated 14 January 1974, as follows:

Corresponding Original Chinese Version: 西贡当局在武装侵犯我国领土的同时，还采用"恶人先告状"的手法，捏造了所谓中国"突然"对西沙群岛主权"提出异议"的谎言。企图混淆视听，<u>居然说</u>西贡对西沙群岛拥有完全的"主权"，<u>还说什么</u>在一九五一年旧金山会议上，没有任何国家对它的这个主权要求提出异议。

The original Chinese version demonstrates a markedly stronger tone, as illustrated by expressions such as "居然说" and "还说什么...". This assertive language conveys a progressive emotion of strong indignation and condemnation towards China, aligning more closely with Chinese expressive norms and resonating more effectively with the intended audience. In contrast, while the revised translation by the authors accurately conveys the original meaning, it does not fully preserve the syntactic tone of the original text.

4.2.2   Conversion of Passive Voice

In English, passive constructions are frequently utilized when the subject is extensive, with "it" functioning as the formal subject. As Gramley and Pätzold (1992) contend, "The passive allows the authors to step back and the work reported on to stand at the center of attention." This impersonal approach can impart an objective and impartial tone to the source text, thereby circumventing subjective conjecture and "the pusillanimous shrinking from responsibility".

Example 6: When the dispute first arose, it was agreed that on political and legal grounds we should not intervene on substance since this was not a dispute in which we are involved.

Initial Translation: 当争端第一次出现时，大家一致同意，既然这一争端并未涉及我国，因此我国不应在政治和法律方面进行干涉。

Revised Translation: 由于此争端并未牵扯我国，因此在争端最初出现时，基于政治和法律理由，我方一致认为，不应加以实质性干预。

Translation Purpose: To convert English expressions that are objective and indirect into the active and direct expressions typically employed in Chinese, thereby elucidating the responsible agent or actor.

Strategy Selection: Implementing strategies such as "transforming passive to active voice" or "converting generic subjects". This involves providing the logical subject or converting sentences into Chinese subjectless or judgment sentences.

The impersonal passive construction, as illustrated in Example 6, does not explicitly identify the agent and presents the objective fact in an indirect manner. The authors inferred that "it" refers to "we should not intervene on substance", with "we" being the implied subject performing the action denoted by the verb "agree". This interpretation translates the sentence in accordance with the original English syntax and transforms the passive construction into an active one by introducing the actual subject, "we", in the initial version. The revised translation modifies the word order, such as the "reason + consequence" structure, to align more closely with the audience's logical processing, thereby facilitating their reasoning with minimal effort.

4.3   Purpose-driven Integration at the Textual Level

Liu (2007) argues that practical stylistic translation serves as an example of communicative translation, which should be executed at the textual level. From a discourse perspective, practical texts generally follow a relatively fixed "conventional" text format specification, embedded within the cognitive frameworks of both the original author and the target audience, thereby facilitating effective communication. Newmark (2001) asserts that all translation challenges ultimately distill to the issue of how to express the text in the target language. In translation, the target language text must adhere to the specifications of the target text and align with the reading habits of the intended audience. Additionally, text linguistics conceptualizes translation as a top-down process, wherein the translator initially identifies the attributes and types of the target text and its communicative function within the target language culture, subsequently realizing the predetermined text through the systematic application of language structures.

4.3.1   Clarification of Intertextual References

At the textual level, it is imperative for authors to verify references to ensure the accuracy of the original text's default information. They should employ compensatory strategies such as annotation, extension of meaning, and concretization to accurately convey the contextual effect of the original text.

Example 7: Member government also noted that, according to paragraph 2, Article IV of the Manila Pact, the initiative in raising matters under this article must be taken by one of the parties to the Treaty.

Initial Translation: 成员国政府亦指出，根据《马尼拉条约》第4条第2款之规定，本条约仅适用于解决各缔约国主动提出的事宜。

Revised Translation: 众成员国政府亦指出，根据《马尼拉条约》第4条第2款之规定ª，在本条款下，向条约组织提请解决争议的必须为领土主权受到侵犯的一方。

ª《马尼拉条约》第4条第2款规定：若缔约任何一方认为，在本条约第1款规定的地区或任何其他国家或领土范围内，任何一方领土的不可侵犯或完整性，或该方领土的主权或政治独立性，受到了武装攻击以外方式的威胁，或受到了可能危及该地区和平的事实或情况的影响和威胁，则双方应即刻进行商讨，从而在共同防御的举措方面达成共识。译自 https://alphahistory.com/coldwar/manila-pact-seato-1954/。（译者注）

Translation Purpose: To facilitate comprehension among target readers who may lack pertinent background knowledge, thereby ensuring the conveyance of the historical context and the deeper meanings embedded within the archive.

Strategy Selection: Adopting a strategy of "intratextual integration + compensatory annotation", and providing essential background for significant historical events, treaty clauses, personal relationships, etc., through translator's notes.

The authors identified that the subordinate clause originates from "paragraph 2, Article IV of the Manila Pact" and encounter challenges in interpreting its implied meaning and its underlying connection with the subordinate clause. Subsequently, the authors conducted an online search for information pertaining to "paragraph 2, Article IV of the Manila Pact", which elucidates the relationship between Paragraph 2 and the subordinate clause. Consequently, the authors employed explanatory annotation as a compensatory strategy to provide the background for this paragraph, thereby facilitating easier inference for the audience. The annotation itself becomes an integral part of the target text's informational completeness, enhancing the text's academic value and credibility.

4.3.2 Cultural Adaptation of Text Schemata

Werlich (1982), a German scholar, asserts that the construction and analysis of all texts are governed by two primary principles: external constraints, such as context and genre, and internal composition rules. According to these principles, the fundamental components of a text include the beginning, sequential form, text structure, text units, and endings. Huang (2008) argues that each text represents a specific genre and should effectively convey information and fulfill its communicative function through a relatively fixed schematic structure and language realization pattern. In the source text, nearly all telegrams exhibit a relatively fixed schematic structure, comprising sender information, cc information, subject line, main content, and addressor.

Example 8:

…

Sally Morphet

S&SEA Section

RD

Initial Translation:

……

萨利·莫菲特（Sally Morphet）

南亚与东南亚处（S&SEA Section）

研究司（RD/Research Department）

Revised Translation:

……

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研究司（RD/Research Department）

南亚与东南亚处（S&SEA Section）

萨利・莫菲特（Sally Morphet）

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Translation Purpose: To ensure that the target text aligns with the textual conventions and reading preferences of the target language culture in terms of genre, format, and style, thereby achieving "generic equivalence".

Strategy Selection: Implementing a "schema reconstruction" approach. This involves modifying elements such as telegram headings, signature placements, and paragraph divisions to align with the format requirements of Chinese official documents or archival files.

The textual structure and linguistic expression of the source text may not align with the cultural norms of the target language or the reading habits of the intended audience. Consequently, the authors reconstructed the text to ensure it achieves pragmatic equivalence for the target audience, rather than merely transforming the surface structure. In Example 8, the addressor's name in the letter's closing is placed before the organization, and within the organizational format, the subordinate unit precedes the superior one, which does not conform to the formal letter format in China. Therefore, in the revised translation, the authors moved the organization name before the addressor's name and arranged the superior unit first followed by the subordinate unit. This seemingly minor adjustment enhances the professionalism and formality of the target text within the Chinese context, giving archive users (e.g., researchers, diplomats) a sense of familiarity and trust, thereby better realizing the text's academic and referential functions.

The preceding analysis demonstrates that Skopos Theory offers a clear, adaptable, and explanatory framework for decision-making in the context of South China Sea archive translation practices. This theory repositions the translator from a passive seeker of "equivalence" to an active implementer of "function", whereby each translation decision is a deliberate action aimed at fulfilling specific communicative objectives.

5. Conclusion

This study has demonstrated the effectiveness of Skopos Theory as a guiding framework for translating politically sensitive historical archives, using the Chinese translation of the British FCO document "Territorial Disputes of China" as a case study. It establishes that the translation of such archives is not a neutral act of linguistic transfer but a purposeful activity serving a tripartite objective: providing accurate source material for academic research, furnishing supportive historical evidence for sovereignty discourse, and ensuring textual acceptability within the target cultural and academic context. By applying a purpose-oriented analytical model to lexical, syntactic, and textual challenges, the research illustrates how specific translation strategies—ranging from the prioritized adoption of established toponyms to the strategic restructuring of sentences and the compensatory use of annotations—are directly motivated by and evaluated against these overarching communicative purposes. The study thus bridges the gap between practical translation experience and theoretical justification, offering a replicable framework for similar projects.

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Conflicts of Interest

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