



UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA

***REFRAMING NARRATIVES FOR CORPORATE IDENTITIES IN THE
TRANSLATION OF CORPORATE PROFILES IN CHINA
MULTINATIONAL CORPORATIONS***

WANG LI

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CORPORATIONS**

By

WANG, LI

**Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, Universiti Putra
Malaysia, in Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy**

February 2022

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Abstract of thesis presented to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia in fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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February 2022

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Facing the changing social and economic situation globally and out of the need for development, China's multinational corporations (hereafter as MNCs) resort to updating ways of "story-telling" in corporate profile translation towards overseas markets. However, it is yet to be understood how story-telling reconstitutes corporate identities in corporate profile translation from the narrative approach. Therefore this study attempts to address the problem: how are narratives reframed to reconstitute corporate identities in the translation of corporate profiles of China's MNCs? The aim of the study is threefold: to determine the extent to which narrativity features change over translation; to explore what reframing strategies are employed behind the shift of narrativity features; to identify and analyse how corporate identities are reconstituted by the relational networks of narrativity in translating corporate profiles.

This research carried out an inductive qualitative study by narrative analysis. The analysis is based on Margaret Somers' narrative identity constitution and Mona Baker's (re)framing strategies in translation. Data are collected out of the homogenous sampling of 12 manufacturing MNCs' profiles for in-depth information. A combination of content analysis and thematic analysis is conducted with the aid of Atlas ti. This study uses content analysis to detect explicit messages such as most narrativity features and reframing strategies. Thematic analysis is used to study the latent message concerning the relationality of parts inside the narratives and the relational settings embedding the corporate identities.

The study's results show differences and similarities in each narrativity feature between the samples' source and target texts. Nevertheless, there is no unified pattern found as to how narrativity features are shifted via translation. The results

indicate that corporate profiles possess a unique narrative structure. The results also show that the strategies reframe the narratives in uneven proportions behind the shifts in narrativity features. Besides the four core reframing strategies proposed by Mona Baker, new strategies are found to reframe corporate profiles' narrativity via translation, the most salient of them being reframing by overstating or understating. Further, what translations methods are used to achieve the strategies are clarified in this study. Lastly, the results show that the shifts in each narrativity feature do not affect the setting separately. They work as an organic whole in reconstitution of corporate identities from two dimensions. Most importantly, even though the shifts in narrativity features result in different relational settings embedding the corporate identities in the target texts, the extents to which corporate identities are reconstituted are limited.

The significance of the study lies in three aspects. First, this study takes a fresh approach in translation studies regarding the entire narrative as the analysis unit. Second, the study's findings add to the present knowledge of translation methods achieving reframing strategies and complement the current literature on reframing narratives in translation by identifying new reframing strategies. Lastly, this study might help other emerging MNCs find new ways to present themselves in target markets.

Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia
sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk ijazah Doktor Falsafah

**MERANGKA SEMULA NARATIF UNTUK IDENTITI KORPORAT DALAM
TERJEMAHAN PROFIL SYARIKAT KORPORAT MULTINASIONAL CHINA**

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Menghadapi perubahan situasi sosial dan ekonomi pada peringkat global dan di luar keperluan pembangunan, syarikat multinasional China (kini dikenali sebagai MNC) mengambil langkah mengemas kini cara "penceritaan" dalam terjemahan profil korporat ke arah pasaran luar negara. Walau bagaimanapun, masih belum difahami cara penceritaan dalam pembentukan semula identiti korporat dalam terjemahan profil korporat berdasarkan pendekatan naratif. Oleh itu kajian ini cuba menangani masalah: bagaimana naratif dirangka untuk membentuk semula identiti korporat dalam terjemahan profil korporat MNC China? Matlamat kajian ini terbahagi kepada tiga perkara iaitu untuk menentukan sejauh mana ciri-ciri naratif berubah berdasarkan terjemahan; untuk meneroka strategi perangkaan semula yang digunakan di sebalik peralihan ciri naratif; untuk mengenal pasti dan menganalisis cara identiti korporat disusun semula oleh rangkaian perhubungan naratif dalam menterjemah profil korporat.

Kajian ini merupakan kajian kualitatif induktif berdasarkan analisis naratif. Analisis ini adalah berdasarkan prinsip identiti naratif Margaret Somers dan strategi perangkaan (semula) Mona Baker dalam bidang terjemahan. Data dikumpul daripada pensampelan homogen 12 profil pembuatan MNC untuk maklumat terperinci. Gabungan analisis kandungan dan analisis tematik dijalankan dengan bantuan Atlas ti. Kajian ini menggunakan analisis kandungan untuk mengesan mesej eksplisit seperti kebanyakan ciri narativiti dan strategi perangkaan semula. Analisis tematik digunakan untuk mengkaji mesej terpendam mengenai kaitan antara bahagian dalam naratif dan tetapan perhubungan yang membenamkan identiti korporat.

Keputusan kajian menunjukkan persamaan dan perbezaan dalam setiap ciri naratif antara sumber sampel dan teks sasaran. Namun begitu, tiada penyatuan corak ditemui berkaitan cara ciri narativiti dialihkan melalui terjemahan. Keputusan menunjukkan bahawa strategi merangka semula naratif menunjukkan perkadaran tidak sekata di sebalik peralihan terhadap ciri naratif. Kemudian, keputusan menunjukkan strategi merangka semula naratif dalam perkadaran tidak sekata di sebalik peralihan dalam ciri naratif. Selain empat teras strategi perangkaan semula yang dicadangkan oleh Mona Baker, terdapat strategi baharu ditemui untuk merangka semula narativiti profil korporat melalui terjemahan. Selanjutnya, kaedah terjemahan yang digunakan untuk mencapai strategi juga dijelaskan dalam kajian ini. Akhir sekali, keputusan menunjukkan bahawa anjakan dalam setiap ciri narativiti tidak menjejaskan tetapan secara berasingan. Narativiti bekerja secara keseluruhan organik dalam penyusunan semula identiti korporat daripada dua dimensi. Paling penting, walaupun perubahan anjakan dalam ciri narativiti menghasilkan tetapan hubungan yang berbeza yang menerapkan identiti korporat dalam teks sasaran, sejauh mana identiti korporat dibentuk semula adalah terhad.

Kepentingan kajian ini terletak pada tiga aspek. Pertama, kajian ini mengambil pendekatan baharu dalam kajian terjemahan berkenaan keseluruhan naratif sebagai unit analisis. Kedua, dapatan kajian menambah pengetahuan semasa kaedah terjemahan yang mencapai strategi perangkaan semula dan melengkapkan literatur semasa mengenai pembingkai semula naratif dalam terjemahan dengan mengenal pasti strategi perangkaan semula yang baharu. Akhir sekali, kajian ini mungkin dapat membantu MNC baharu lain yang muncul untuk mencari cara baharu bagi menampilkan diri mereka dalam pasaran sasaran.

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This thesis was submitted to the Senate of the Universiti Putra Malaysia and has been accepted as fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. The members of the Supervisory Committee were as follows:

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

MNC	Multinational Corporation
ST	source text
TT	target text
RQ	research question
RCA	Refugee Council of Australia
Wos	Web of Science
TNI	Transnational index
ICT	Information and communication technology
CRRC	CRRC Corporation Limited
Sinopec	China Petrochemical Corporation
Sinomach	China National Machinery Corporation

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the study

After China chose to embrace “trade liberalisation and other market-oriented reforms” (IMF Staff, 2001), globalisation and China’s economic reforms, or, in other words, “reform and opening-up”, have contributed to the rise of China’s MNCs (Preen, 2019). Nevertheless, it has never been a smooth path for China’s MNCs to gain success. The financial crash of 2008, the US-China trade war since 2018, as well as the Covid-19 pandemic, are three “body-blows” hurting trade and dragging down globalisation (“Globalisation unwound - Has covid-19 killed globalisation?”, 2020). Under such circumstances, China’s MNCs have followed the government’s instructions of “telling good stories” to target markets (Xinhua, 2018). Consequently, the manner in which these MNCs present their corporate identities through story-telling narratives in exploring foreign markets may suggest a model for other emerging economies and in-depth information for translation studies in the body of literature.

China started its economic reform with the “reform and opening-up” approach introducing market principles as early as 1978 (Wang & Miao, 2016, p. 12). However, breakthrough came when China joined the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2001 (Anon, 2017, p. 3) after long and arduous negotiations under “considerable harsher conditions than other developing countries” (Branstetter & Lardy, 2006, p. 655). Globalisation “thrust China into cross-national networks for production, design, and research in a growing array of industries” (Brandt & Rawski, 2008, p. 570). Along with joining the WTO, China’s government carried out a series of economic reforms to embrace globalisation, including macroeconomic development and structural adjustment (Garnaut et al., 2018), which transformed China from a centrally-planned economy into a “market-oriented economy” (Song, 2018).

This transition effort was a success. Since then, China has maintained “unprecedented high-speed growth in the world economic history” (Lin Yifu, 2018), with an average annual economic growth of 8.9% and international trading growth as high as 14.8%. By 2010, China had replaced Germany as the world largest exporter. In 2015, Mainland China alone “accounted for a third of the world’s total labour-intensive and resource-intensive manufactured exports” (Magalhães, 2018, p. 5). In 2017, international trade increased compared with the statistics in 1978 (Chinese Academy of International Trade and Economic Cooperation, 2018).

Behind these figures is the rise of China's MNCs. Due to both "government motivation and business necessity" (Backaler, 2014, p. 33), China's local corporations, such as Alibaba, Tencent, Huawei and CITIC Group, took opportunities to learn from foreign MNCs in going global. They aim to access new markets, advanced technology, international talent, natural resources, and global brands outside of China and have made successful attempts (Backaler, 2014, p. 33).

However, since 2010, the economic situation at home and abroad for these MNCs has not always been, and will not continue to be so promising. For decades, the global economy has suffered various slowdowns, which has hindered globalisation in international business. The 2008 Global Financial Crisis "badly affected China's exports" (Adas & Tussupova, 2016, p. 136). Besides, the US-China trade war and the Covid-19 pandemic have added fuel to the fire (Lukin 2019; McKibbin & Fernando, 2020). Meanwhile, compared with Western MNCs, China's MNCs are "significantly younger" and lack experience in constituting successful corporate identities outside China (Backaler, 2014, p. 10) Therefore, in the initial attempts of going global, failures were remarkable, for example, the failed attempts of Lining and Jianlibao to enter the US market, and about 300 overseas failed mergers and acquisition cases from 2008 and 2010 (Backaler, 2014).

Past failures in building up corporate identities didn't stop China's MNCs from trying to go global. On the contrary, there is much to be learned by China's multinational corporations-to-be from domestic corporations such as Jianlibao and foreign corporations such as Coca-Cola. Policy-makers have suggested for MNCs to emphasise the value of telling stories. On August 21, 2018, Chinese President Xi Jinping gave a speech about the role of publicity new international situations. He stated that "we will improve our ability to engage in international communication to tell China's stories well" (Xinhua, 2018). The government further asserted that international communication through China's corporations is "an important subject" to tell China's stories, which shouldn't be narrowed down to just the register of the industry but should be included in the much broader national narratives as well (Niansheng & Ao, 2017).

"Story-telling" in the context of international communication, as mentioned above in Xi's speech, has been interpreted by Chinese academia as a way of narrative framing (Jin & Shihua, 2017; Jiqiang, 2019; Ziyuan, 2017). Narrative study in social sciences has provided a theoretical foundation for this interpretation. Margaret Somers defined narratives as "constellations of relationships (connected parts) embedded in time and space, constituted by causal employment" (Somers & Gibson, 1993, p. 27). She also argued that identities are embedded in the relational settings of narrative. Therefore, any shift in the relational settings will cause a shift in identity constitution. From the narrative approach, in corporate communication practice, to fit into the target markets, China's MNCs attempts to continuously configure ways of telling their stories is

the process of framing and reframing their narratives to build up more acceptable corporate identities than before.

For an MNC, corporate profiles and their translations are significant in narrative (re)framing and identity constitution among all the means in corporate communication. Successful examples include state-owned China Huaneng Group and Power Construction Corporation of China and private-owned corporations such as Huawei and Zhejiang Geely Holding Group. Among them, Power Construction Corporation of China even provides the list of dates of updating corporate profiles on its website to show its efforts to inform readers of the newest information about the corporation (Anon, 2019a). Furthermore, some corporations attempted unconventional corporate profiles and translations in presenting their narratives. A case in point is the Ruyi Group's corporate profiles. Ruyi has brief but artistically presented Chinese and English corporate profiles (Anon, n.d.), which is congruent with its ambition of becoming a top "luxury fashion group" rather than a "textile manufacturer" (Wenqian & Chuanjiang, 2018).

There are two reasons for the "prominence" of corporate profiles in corporate communication (Capriotti & Moreno, 2007, p. 88). First, information about the corporation is selected and linked together to fulfil the "self-presentation function" of a corporation. A standard corporate profile usually contains business information, general business activities, company strategy, scope of work, financial considerations and so on (Capriotti & Moreno, 2007; Richa, 2014). Second, because corporate profiles are "the only areas for which a suitable combination of the communication resources available is used" (Capriotti & Moreno, 2007), they serve as the most direct way for target readers to acquire the first impression of the corporations.

Studying the constitution of their corporate identities in the translation of their profiles from the narrative approach is significant due to the following two facts. First, since the globalisation of China's corporations is "an unprecedented phenomenon in corporate history" (Tse & Hung, 2020, p. 8), their corporate identity constitution offers a model for other emerging economies. Second, though story-telling has been officially and academically recognised as an increasingly important method for presenting China's MNCs to the overseas market, there has been a gap in linking it with corporate communication. The shifts made in narratives and the effects on identities play a pivotal role in addressing narratives in translation. Therefore, this study investigates the narrative reframing in the translation of corporate profiles of China's MNCs and its consequences on the constitution of their corporate identities.

1.2 Problem statement

China's MNCs have been continuously updating their "story-telling" in corporate profile translation to present desired corporate identities to target markets, rendering themselves samples with rich information in narrative translation studies. Yet, the shifts in narrativity features in translating corporate profiles have been unexplored. There remains scant evidence on studying changes of narrativity features in translating corporate profiles of China's MNCs. First and foremost, what is not yet clear is the extent to which these changes occur in translating corporate profiles of China's MNCs.

Due to the changes in social and economic situations, China's MNCs are hampered by the country's unfavourable image worldwide and "the dynamic nature of resistance" from target markets (Tse & Hung 2020; Yu & Liu, 2018). Several recent case studies have shown that target markets usually regard emerging market MNCs such as Chinese MNCs as lacking in competence and warmth (Yu & Liu, 2018) and not so attractive as MNCs from developed countries (Held & Bader, 2018).

Another challenge for China's MNCs is that the global economy has been suffering various slowdowns in the past several decades, which has hindered globalisation in international business. Since 2020, the Covid-19 pandemic have added fuel to the fire (Lukin, 2019; McKibbin & Fernando, 2020).

Even before the Covid-19 pandemic, the direct consequence of global economic slowdown has been evident, as depicted in the Global Risk Report 2019 presented by the Davos World Economic Forum. In this report, "global risks are intensifying but the collective will to tackle them appears to be lacking", and people have most concerns about "the deteriorating international economic environment" (Forum, 2019, p. 10). Additionally, "the economic anxiety and distributional struggles exacerbated by globalisation generate a base for populism" (Rodrik et al., 2018, p. 13). Countries have turned to protectionism and tightened the controls over foreign trade, especially towards a country like China with a different social and ideological system from theirs. The US-China "trade war" (Lukin, 2019) started in the latter half of 2018 for fear of China's "economic aggression" (White House Office of Trade and Manufacturing Policy, 2018, p. 2) is a case in point. Here, China is commented as having "a nasty tendency to favour its own" businesses, especially the government-controlled businesses (Schuman, 2019). Such comments make it harder for Chinese MNCs to expand their target foreign markets.

Furthermore, compared with Western MNCs, China's MNCs are "significantly younger" and lack experience in constituting successful corporate identities outside of China (Backaler, 2014, p. 10). In its early economic transition to a market-oriented economy, the leaders of China's state-owned corporations were

"upgraded from agents of the State to real managers" (Peverelli, 2006, p. 5) with no professional knowledge about corporate communications. The first Chinese private-owned corporations also didn't even have a clear blueprint to follow (Murmann et al., 2017, p. 3). Consequently, early leaders of Chinese firms took "a very hands-on approach" in expanding new markets (Backaler, 2014, p. 24). Hence, constituting corporate identities for foreign markets wasn't smooth at the beginning for these MNCs.

Despite the challenges, out of the need to develop business, Chinese MNCs have never stopped learning from both the successes and failures of mature Western MNCs (Murmann et al., 2017) and the pioneering corporations of China in exploring foreign markets (Backaler, 2016). They have been updating ways of "story-telling" in corporate communication to form desired corporate identities towards overseas markets. Specifically, they have realised the importance of continuously adapting their corporate profiles and English translations to target stakeholders over recent years. Abundant cases of such attempts have emerged over time.

Under the context of globalisation, translation is deemed as a "global" kind of writing (Homer & Tetreault, 2016). It is supposed to meet the demand of spreading "information and products quickly and efficiently to global markets anytime, anywhere, and in any language" (Homer & Tetreault, 2016, p. 14). A special feature of translation is that it does not produce the sameness over languages but differences, which adds to its complexity. Yet it is difficult to determine the differences caused by translation as translation includes diversified patterns. In translating corporate communication, there exist different kinds of translation. For example, when different parties are involved in the translation process (translators, language service managers, the customers and so on), more time is consumed via the process of transcreation. A case in point is found in the work report on the translating corporate profiles of two corporations of China by Chen Lei. The translating process involves three stages: before, while, and after translation. In the last stage, the translator, the translator's peers, and an entrusting party evaluated the translation work (Lei, 2021). Besides consuming more time and energy, transcreation conveys new messages than traditional translation (Wang et al., 2021). However complex it is, like other emerging translation methods such as adaption or multimodal translation, transcreation is still categorised as a translation method (Gambier & Doorslaer, 2013). Therefore, it is important to examine the difference or similarities caused by various translation methods in corporate profile translation.

Essentially, telling the story of a corporation through translation is a form of narrative in that narratives are described as "storied ways of knowing and communicating" (Riessman, 2005, p. 2). Translation is also regarded by scholars such as Mona Baker to be a (re)framing process, in which features of narrativity are "exploited" by "language users, including translators and interpreters" to "frame or reframe a text or utterance" (Baker, 2007, p. 158). Hence, the process

of reframing narratives in adapting corporate identities to "respond to dynamic changes in the external world" (Grant, 1999) is carried out via texts with various features of narrativity (Somers, 1994). From the narrative perspective, the translation of corporate profiles of China's MNCs into target texts are responses "to dynamic changes in the external world" (Grant, 1999). To study how narratives are reframed in translation, the unit of analysis should be "ultimately an entire narrative" (Baker, 2010, p. 349). Furthermore, Margaret Somers has called for attention to the systematic studies on the narrativity features in narrative studies by putting forward four narrativity features as a systematic whole (Somers, 1994, 2008), which was introduced into translation study by Mona Baker (Baker, 2006, 2017).

Nevertheless, story-telling as a narrative reframing process against resistance from target markets "has received inadequate attention in mainstream literature" of translation studies (Yu & Liu, 2018, p. 348). The existing studies of translation as reframed narrative have mainly focused on empirical studies in the translation of literature, social services, or media (Best et al., 2014; Constantinou 2017; Corman, 2016; Jacobs, 2018). There are abundant studies on individual components of narratives, such as rhetorical analysis (Dodge & Keränen, 2018), interview analysis (Johnson, 2016), corpus (Rizzo, 2018), linguistic study (Gundersen, 2016), and process-tracing (Bolton & Minor, 2016). In contrast, the significance of studying narrative systematically in corporate communications such as translation of corporate profiles has been lacking.

Another issue exists on whether the strategies applied in narrative (re)framing in politics and media are equivalent to those employed in translating corporate profiles. Precisely how reframing strategies behind the changed narrativity features are employed to translate corporate profiles remains unclear. Although there are abundant studies in the strategies used for reframing narratives in translation, the list of strategies employed in framing and reframing is open-ended (Baker, 2006), depending on different areas. In Mona Baker's (2006) *Translation and Conflict: A Narrative Account*, after outlining features of narrativity in translation, she explored how these narratives "reproduced" a "political changed narrative in the target text" (Baker, 2006, p. 105), which she referred to as the process of (re)framing narratives (Baker, 2007). She proposed four core (re)framing strategies in translation: temporal and spatial framing, framing through selective appropriation, framing by labelling, and repositioning of participants. However, these strategies are proposed mainly to analyse political and media translation (Saleh, 2017; Zhang & Qin, 2017). Within the broad area of communication, (re)framing has covered "a whole range of cognitive, linguistic, and cultural processes within a variety of organizational and institutional contexts" (Cornelissen & Werner, 2014, p. 3). Yet the scope of the present-day studies has not extended to the reframing strategies in corporate communication translation.

Besides, there is another issue as to how corporate identities are reconstituted through narrative reframing in the translation of corporate profiles of China's MNCs since little is known about how narratives are reframed through translation in a special register like the corporate profile of China's MNCs. It is essential to understand that narrativity, reframing, and identity are related terms (Baker, 2006; Somers, 1994, 2008). In other words, narrativity features form two-dimensional relational settings in which identities are embedded. Hence, the process of reframing narratives in adapting identities is carried out via texts with various features of narrativity (Somers, 1994). Any changes in the narrativity features via translation will reconstitute corporate identities in different relational settings.

Generally, there is scant research on how narrative reframing in the context of corporate profiles translation of China's MNCs reconstitute their corporate identities in the target texts, hence, a practical knowledge gap exists. This study attempts to fill in the gap by firstly comparing the features of narrativity in translated English profiles and the source texts of China's MNCs to define the extent to which they change. Second, it examines the strategies of reframing narratives in the translated profiles of Chinese MNCs behind the changes in narrativity. The third involves identifying and analysing the corporate identities reconstituted through reframing narratives in the translation.

1.3 Research objectives

This study attempts to study the corporate profiles of China's MNCs and their translation from the narrative approach and the reframing strategies which mediated the translation. It also intends to study the corporate identities constituted by the reframing in translation as a consequence. Specifically, there are three research objectives.

1. To compare the features of narrativity in translated English profiles and the source texts of China's MNCs.
2. To examine the strategies of reframing narratives in the translated profiles of China's MNCs.
3. To identify and analyse the corporate identities reconstituted through the reframing of narratives in the translation.

1.4 Research questions

Based on the research objectives presented above, the research questions of this study are as follows:

1. What are the differences and similarities in features of narrativity between Chinese and English corporate profiles of China's MNCs?

2. How are narratives reframed in the translation of corporate profiles of China's MNCs?
3. To what extent do the reframed narratives reconstitute the corporate identities?

1.5 Theoretical framework

Three theories are employed to provide the theoretical basis for the study of narrative reframing in the translation of corporate profiles of Chinese MNCs. They are: Margaret Somers's narrativity and narrative identity constitution from (Somers, 1992, 1994, 2008; Somers & Gibson, 1993) and Baker's (re)framing strategies in translation (Baker, 2006, 2007).

Of all the scholars on the study of narratives, Margaret Somers made "a systematic entry to the theories of narrative identity" (Hyvärinen, 2016, p. 45) by linking social epistemology with social ontology through narrative and narrativity. Through narrativity, random events are selected and linked to narratives. She also proposed a relational setting in the study of the constitution of identities. Margaret Somers argued that identities are embedded in a temporal and spatial network through narratives. In this way, she rebutted the rigid categorisation of identities (Somers, 1994).

Mona Baker was among the first to draw on theories of sociology in translation studies (Baker, 2006). She combined Margaret Somers's theory of narrative and other scholars' theories with her own framework of (re)framing strategies in translation. However, when it comes to the research objective of this study, not all the (re)framing strategies work for constituting identities through narratives. Table 1.1 summarises the study's research questions and the theories that are related to them, respectively.

Table 1.1 : Theories that guide the study

	Research Questions	Grounded Theories
1	What are the differences and similarities in features of narrativity between Chinese and English corporate profiles of multinational corporations of China?	Features of narrativity (Somers, 1994)
2	How narratives are reframed in the translation of corporate profiles of multinational corporations of China?	(Re)framing strategies in Translation (Baker, 2006)
3	To what extent do the reframed narratives reconstitute the corporate identities?	Narrative constitution of identity (Somers, 1994)

1.5.1 Narrative approach to translation studies

Narratives, in a general way, are “storied ways of knowing and communicating” (Riessman, 2005, p. 2) not only representing but also (re)producing reality (Mura, 2015, p. 226). Any text in any subject, written or unwritten, belongs to one of or a mixed form of the four types of narratives proposed by Margaret Somers and Gloria Gibson: “ontological (personal), public, conceptual and meta-narratives” (Somers & Gibson, 1993, p. 30). Therefore, the narrative approach is an umbrella approach in research because there is no unified methodology to study different kinds of narratives, and because it could be joined with tools borrowed from other areas.

In literature study, narrative either refers to one of the modes of communication, such as argumentation or exposition (Baker, 2005, p. 4), or a kind of rhetoric device, a “technique” (Booth, 2010, p. 51). The narrative approach is used to analyse the relationships between the narrator, the implied author and the author in literary works. Literature theorists such as Käte Friedemann, Käte Hamburger or Franz Stanzel considered the voice of the narrator as a form of mediation, which they regard as the main feature of narratives as well (Brütsch, 2017, p. 316).

Study of mediation or narrators’ voices as a major feature of narratives has been introduced to other areas from literature. In social pragmatics, narratives of a particular group are analysed for the narrator’s intention psychologically or sociologically, which has been proven to be a useful methodology in social sciences to provide relevant information about both ‘self’ and its social environment (Mura, 2015; Riessman, 2017). For example, as interpretive research, the narrative analysis of tourists’ internet blogs and online interviews of the tourists shows their perception of “authenticity” experience in Malaysian homestay (Mura, 2015).

However, the recent narrative turn in sociology has linked social action with identities (Somers, 1994, p. 615). The narrative study, therefore, possesses not only epistemological, but also ontological dimensions. In another case study by Jeremy A. Rud, former refugees’ narratives adapted and published by the Refugee Council of Australia (RCA hereafter) are analysed. Strategies used by the RCA to “serve the organization’s goals to respond to myths and misinformation and prevent the formation of negative opinions of refugees” (Rud, 2018, p. 37) are examined in this case study. One essential result of the study is that by shifting in hermeneutic composability, a narrativity feature proposed by Jerome Bruner, RCA created identities of former refugees in line with mainstream values of Australians since RCA’s ways of narrating which “appeal to the Australian nationalism implicit in the contemporary political climate” (Rud, 2018, p. 2). The focus of this study has turned from former concern on narrative representation of the social reality to the refugees’ identities constituted by narratives.

Margaret Somers and Gloria Gibson proposed four features of narrativity, which Mona Baker has commented as “defining” (Baker, 2006, p. 50): relationality of parts, causal emplotment, selective appropriation and temporality, sequence and place (Somers & Gibson, 1993, p. 27). Later, Margaret Somers elaborated the four features as a relational network and joined narrativity with the constitution of narrative identity in her paper *The Narrative Constitution of Identity: A Relational and Network Approach* (Somers, 1994). These four features are agreed and introduced by Mona Baker into translation studies (Baker, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2014).

In this study, the four features of narrativity between source texts (hereafter STs) and target texts (hereafter TTs) of samples are compared. However, due to the interdisciplinary nature of translation, the ways used to analyse narratives in one register of texts cannot be copied in analysing the translation of all texts. Some might be more prominent in organising time and place, such as news translation, while some might rely more on causal effects, such as translation of fictional works. Take corporate communication translation as an example. Even though by nature it is a way of story-telling like other narratives (Norlyk et al., 2013), it has unique features of representing reality because it aims to build a corporate identity that both meets the requirement of the corporation and fitting it to target markets. Therefore, selective appropriation might outweigh temporality in such kind of translation. Accordingly, how narratives (re)produce reality in corporate communication translation might be different from others too.

In short, from the narrative approach in translation studies, translation is viewed as more than just “a process of linguistic-transferring” (Constantinou, 2017, p. 36), but most essentially, a process producing various narratives to represent mediated reality and to constitute the desired identity.

1.5.2 Narrative (re)framing strategies by Mona Baker

Framing theory was first put forward in Goffman's *Frame Analysis* in 1974 (Goffman, 1974), describing how “people interpret what is going on around their world through their primary framework (frame)” (Anon, n.d.). Thus far the definition of framing accepted by most scholars was given by Entman in 1993, in which he summed up framing as involving “selection and salience”. Specifically, framing selects parts of “the perceived reality” and makes “them more salient in a communicating text” (Entman, 1993, p. 52).

In other words, framing is the “active process” which “involves setting up structures of anticipation that guide others' interpretation of events” (Baker, 2007, p. 156). Entman also commented on framing as a theory of “scattered conceptualization” (Entman, 1993, p. 51), indicating that framing is always related to diversified fields. Its application scope expanded from scholarly traditions in, for example, linguistics (Wu, 2018) and linguistic anthropology

(Duranti, n.d.), to sociology (Reese et al., 2001), psychology (Flis & Eck, 2018), journalism (Spiessens & Van Poucke, 2016) or mass communication (Valdeón, 2014).

Nevertheless, framing theory applied in different scholarly fields tends to vary, which further specifies the general functions of frames in different areas as well as provides “precise operational guidelines” (Matthes, 2009, p. 350). Moreover, this is especially true when it comes to the concept of “narrative reframing”, relating framing theory with the narrative approach. Some scholars consider reframing as a conflict resolution tool (Kaufman et al., 2003, p. 3), which is commonly employed by “third-party mediators” to reconcile disputes (Spangler, 2003). In narrative study, reframing refers to the way narratives are “mediated” (Baker, 2006), which are believed to be capable of reshaping social realities and reconstructing identities. For example, narratives are reframed by prisoners in therapeutic communities who talk and share about their past “so that a ‘new’ and ‘better’ person emerges whose attitudes and behaviours cohere with long-term desistance from crime” (Stevens, 2012, p. 527).

Translation is regarded as “an accessible (re)framing device that inserts particular ideological loadings in the (re)construction and (re)negotiation of the source narrative” (Hijjo et al., 2019, p. 81). This suggests that the translated TT is “reframed” since the ST is framed (Baker, 2006, 2007); hence, identities tend to be reconstructed out of the reframed narrative during the translation process. A typical example of this is news translation, whereby media coverage is known to vary from one medium to another, following different frames each medium takes. In common news reporting, information is selected and organised to be framed into news. Nevertheless, it is essential to acknowledge that the translation of news reported by a medium from one language to another does more than that. In particular, the translation process involves reframing the narratives in the source news. This helps to reconstruct the facts ensuring that they can either fit into another medium’s stance-taking or become acceptable to the target foreign readers with a different background (Constantinou, 2017; Hijjo et al., 2019; Pormouzeh, 2014).

The list of devices employed in framing and reframing is open-ended, depending on different areas. In Mona Baker’s *Translation and Conflict: A Narrative Account* (Baker, 2006), after outlining features of narrative in translation, she explored how these narratives “reproduced” a “political changed narrative in the target text” (Baker, 2006, p. 105), which she referred to as the process of (re)framing narratives (Baker, 2007). Mona Baker explored narrative (re)framing mainly in political document translation or news translation, such as the choice of the term “Allied” to describe the countries that invaded Iraq in 1991 (Baker, 2006, p. 61). She maintained that translators or interpreters created, negotiated and contested social reality by reframing narrative in translation and that no specific translation choice was random (Baker, 2007, p. 157). Based on her observation of political news translation, she proposed four key strategies in narrative

(re)framing “for mediating the narrative(s) elaborated in a source text or utterance” (Baker, 2006, p. 112): temporal and spatial framing, framing through selective appropriation, framing by labelling, and repositioning of participants. The four key strategies are elaborated in her abovementioned book.

- 1) Temporal and spatial framing: to select and embed a particular text in a temporal and spatial context to “accentuated or suppressed” a narrative viewpoint even though the source narrative may have “a very different temporal and spatial framework”.
- 2) Framing through selective appropriation: the “omission and addition” of events in translation so as “to suppress, accentuate or elaborate particular aspects of a narrative encoded in the source text”.
- 3) Framing by labelling: “using a lexical item, term or phrase to identify a person, place, group, event or any other key element in a narrative”, with the aim to guide and constrain readers’ “response to the narrative in question”.
- 4) Repositioning of participants: the configuration of the participants’ positions “in relation to each other and to those outside the immediate event” through “linguistic choices” in narratives. (Baker, 2006)

However, within the broad area of communication, (re)framing has expanded to encompass “a whole range of cognitive, linguistic, and cultural processes within a variety of organizational and institutional contexts” (Cornelissen & Werner, 2014, p. 3). Therefore, the strategies applied in narrative (re)framing in journalism translation might not be similar to those employed in the translation of corporate communication. The strategies used in narrative reframing in the translation of corporate profiles of China’s MNCs involves interchange from studies of corporate communication, narrative approach and framing theory.

1.5.3 Narrative constitution of corporate identities by Margaret Somers

As stated above, narrative and its narrativity have two dimensions, epistemology (representation of reality) and ontology (the study of being and existence) (Boulton, 2016; White, 2005). Through narrativity, we may understand the social world, and through narrative and narrativity, identities are constituted (Somers, 1992, p. 600).

Originated from the notion of “identity” like individual identity, social identity or organisational identity (Cornelissen et al., 2007), corporate identity is closely related to narratives as well. Cornelissen et al. (2007) emphasised that collective identities as a product of framing or reframing narratives tend to be “fluid rather than fixed” (Cornelissen et al., 2007, p. S8). This is especially true with corporate identity required to “respond to dynamic changes in the external world”

(Grant, 1999). Furthermore, corporate identity refers to “the presentation of an organisation to every stakeholder” (Melewar & Karaosmanoglu, 2006, p. 864). Hence, organisations can express “their own individuality and uniqueness” through corporate identities (Cornelissen et al., 2007, p. S7), which further helps to differentiate themselves from others. In all, the two features of corporate identities, namely fluidity and uniqueness, have led corporations to possess their own corporate identities, which changes over time and space.

For example, even under the same social context, an emerging market like China, different corporations might not try to build the same corporate identity because they want to “have their own individuality and uniqueness” (Cornelissen, 2004, p. 71). Meanwhile, they continuously revise means of corporate communications to present newer corporate identities over time. For example, according to a systematic literature review on corporate identity constructs in China carried out by Sung Ho and Cheng-Hao Steve in 2018, high-tech companies in China focused on the status concern and self-expression more than the “face” and the “look” of the organisation. By contrast, new companies lacking in experience in “more holistic corporate identity” may focus more on “market procedures” than on “a complete branding strategy” (Ho & Steve, 2018, p. 28).

To cope with the unique and fluid characteristics of identities through narrative approach, Margaret Somers stated in her paper *The Narrative Constitution of Identity: A Relational and Network Approach* (Somers, 1994) that identities should never be regarded as rigid categorisations. She proposed to avoid “categorical rigidities by emphasising the embeddedness of identity in overlapping networks of relations that shift over time and space” (Somers, 1994, p. 607). She added that narrative identity is constituted within “relational settings of contested but patterned relations among narratives, people, and institutions” (Somers, 1994, p. 626). Margaret Somers stated that a relational setting is “a pattern of relationships among institutions, public narratives, and social practices” which “must be explored over time and space” (Somers, 1994, p. 626). As such, it is a relational matrix, a social network. In other words, narratives if viewed in terms of relational setting to its “social network”, it is possible to identify the identity constituted. In this study, corporate identities of China’s MNCs constituted by narrative framing in the translation of corporate profiles were analysed in relational settings to unveil what the executives of the corporation want to show to their target audience.

Figure 1.1 below shows the theoretical framework of this study. In short, because “narratives are constellations of relationships (connected parts) embedded in time and space, constituted by causal employment” (Somers, 1994, p. 616), out of random events, narratives are framed or reframed with features of narrativity. Meanwhile, only by viewing narratives under temporal and spatial relational settings, can people identify the identities constituted by narratives.

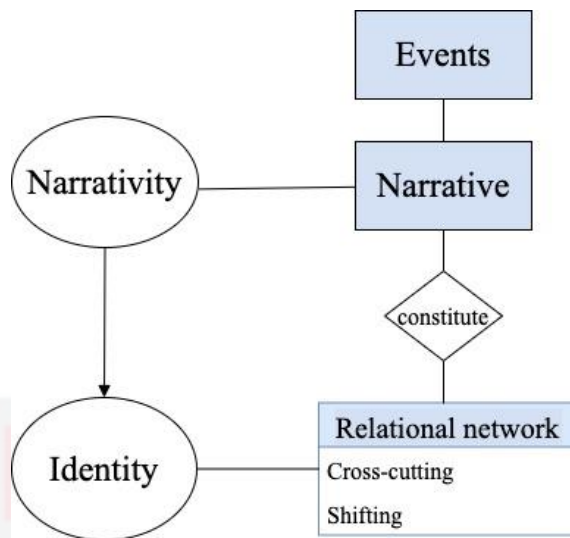


Figure 1.1 : Theoretical framework of the study

1.6 Conceptual framework

The conceptual framework of the study centres on the reframing narrative in the translation of corporate profiles of Chinese MNCs. Since narratives and narrativity have two dimensions, representing the realities and constituting the social identities (Somers, 1992, p. 600), this study studied both. It follows the three primary sections in the narrative approach in analysing reframed narratives namely “what are the changed and the unchanged in the narratives?”, “how are the changes reframed?” and “what are the products of the reframed narratives?”

Firstly, it recognises differences and similarities between the narrativity features of the narratives in corporate profiles and their translation. Based on these findings in narrativity features, this study then explores how narratives are reframed from the ST into the TT to fulfil the communicative function of corporate profiles by examining reframing strategies employed. Finally, since the reframed narratives in TTs constitute desired corporate identities for target stakeholders within a relational setting, this study identifies and analyses how the corporate identities of China’s MNCs are constituted by the reframed narratives to adapt to targetted stakeholders.

Figure 1.2 below illustrates this conceptual framework.

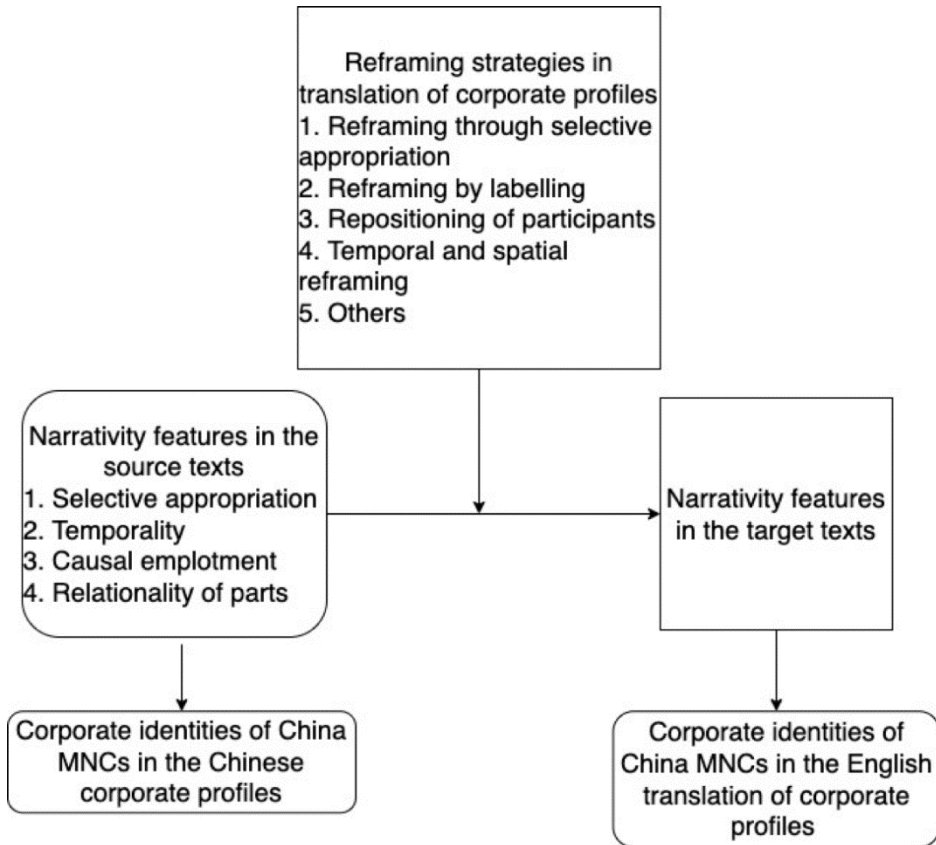


Figure 1.2 : Conceptual framework of the study

1.7 Study scope

The scope of the study is limited to the role of reframing strategies play on the narratives of translation of corporate profiles of China's MNCs and what influences they exert on corporate identities.

Based on the inclusion criterion of the research, this study chosed the samples with valid Transnationality index (TNI) scores and certified as multinational corporations. The samples should also be suitable for a qualitative narrative study. On September 10, 2019, China Enterprise Confederation (CEC) and China Enterprise Directors Confederation (CEDC) jointly published an annual list of *Top 100 Multinational Enterprises of China (2019)*. The samples of this study were taken from this list. Their TNI scores were checked for validity. The

content of their English and Chinese profiles were preliminarily checked to ensure that they fit the inclusion criteria of the study. Consequently, 12 pairs of corporate profiles (both Chinese STs and the English TTs) of China's state-owned manufacturing MNCs are studied. The unit of analysis here is the entire narrative of each ST and TT. The narrativity features of both the STs and TTs are compared for similarities and differences. The reframing strategies bringing about the differences in narrativity were duly extracted. The consequences, the reconstituted corporate identities to adapt to target markets, were analysed.

1.8 Significance of the study

This study contributes to the following three areas, namely, academic research, translation profession and corporate communication for MNCs of emerging economies.

Its contribution to academia is three-pronged. First, it takes on a fresh approach in translation studies by taking the entire narrative as the unit of analysis. Second, it tries to link translation of corporate communications with the concept of narrative reframing, despite the fact that previous mainstream studies focusing on narrative reframing in other registers. Third, it highlights the fluidity and uniqueness of corporate identities, long viewed through rigid perspectives in practice. Meanwhile, it tests the sociological measure for defining corporate identities through a relational network involving time and space.

For the translation profession, this study proves that even dealing with highly specific texts like the translation of corporate profiles, the translators' role cannot be neglected. Reframing the narratives to reconstitute a desired corporate identity to meet executives' intention and to fit the target markets is no less difficult than in translating other types of text. No one can stay away from narratives. This perspective poses challenges as well as opportunities to the profession.

Finally, this study contributes to the study of corporate communications for MNCs of emerging economies by studying the narrative constitution of China's MNCs' corporate identities as a model. Different from corporate image showing how the audience view a corporation, corporate identity shows how a corporation positions itself especially under severe economic pressures facing rigid stereotypes from target markets. Studying how China's MNCs revised their way of narrating and planned corporate identities accordingly can have implications for other emerging economies.

1.9 Definition of terms

1.9.1 Multinational corporations (MNCs)

MNCs refer to companies that operate in their home country, as well as in other countries around the world. They have two characteristics. First, they are large with subsidiaries abroad. Second, their parent companies in the home country “coordinate the management” of all the other subsidiaries (Anon, n.d.).

In this study, Chinese multinational corporations refer to companies with China as their home country with subsidiaries in other countries outside of China.

1.9.2 Corporate profile

A corporate/company profile is “a concise description of a firm which can include its history, values, mission statement, its human and financial resources, and its goods and services, among other things” (Anon, n.d.). Needless to say, a corporate profile offers a quick introduction to a corporation.

In this study, corporate profiles refer to the “About us”, “Company profile” or “Corporate profile” section on the website of a corporation. A standard corporate profile usually contains business information, general business activities, company strategy, the scope of work, financial considerations and so on (Capriotti & Moreno, 2007; Richa, 2014).

1.9.3 Narrative

The definitions of narrative have evolved over time. Scholars such as Margaret Somers and Gloria Gibson (1994), Walter Fisher (1994), Catherine Riessman (2005) and Mona Baker (2005) studied narrative as a branch of the social sciences. This study looks at narratives as “constellations of relationships (connected parts) embedded in time and space, constituted by causal employment” (Somers & Gibson, 1993, p. 27).

1.9.4 Narrativity

Narrativity is “inherent, determinative, and co-extensive with any particular narrative” (Abbott, 2014). Scholars agreed on Suzanne Keen's definition of narrativity as “the set of qualities marking narrative” (Keen, 2015, p. 120). However, this definition is “succinct” (Abbott, 2019, p. 25). When it comes to specific areas, narrativity varies. This study adopts Margaret Somers’s definition of narrativity; in sociology, “narrativity is a condition of social being, social consciousness, social action, institutions, and structures” (Somers, 1992, p. 606).

1.9.5 (Re)framing

Mona Baker introduced framing theory into narrative study in translations and for the first time she mentioned the idea of “(re)framing” (Baker, 2006, p. 111) in her book *Translation and Conflict: A Narrative Account* referring to the mediating and adapting process from STs which are already framed to the TTs which are to be framed again “to present a movement or a particular position within a certain perspective” (Baker, 2006, p. 106). Therefore, in this study, the translation of corporate profiles is a “reframing” process.

1.9.6 Relationality

Margaret Somers and Gloria Gibson proposed the concept of relationality in describing the narrative constitution of identities (Somers, 1992, 1994, 2008; Somers & Gibson, 1993). This study borrowed their definition of relationality as “conditions of social being, social consciousness, social action, institutions, structures, even society itself” (Somers, 1994, p. 621). By relationality, identities are constituted “in the context of internal and external relations of time and place and power that are constantly in flux” (Somers, 1994, p. 621).

1.9.7 Corporate identity

Concerned with the “reality” of a corporation, corporate identity refers to “ what an organisation is” (Balmer, 1998). Specifically in this study, by corporate identity, a corporation identifies itself mainly “through behaviour, communications, as well as through symbolism to internal and external audiences”, such as product, price, logos, brochures, name, signs, websites, uniforms, sponsorships, packages and even buildings (van Riel & Balmer, 1997, p. 341).

1.10 Conclusion

This chapter starts by exploring the background of the economic situation faced by Chinese corporations in “going global” and the current study in this field. This is followed by the problem statement, research objectives and questions, theoretical and conceptual framework, and scope of the study. In essence, the research problem can be identified namely as: How are narratives reframed to reconstitute corporate identities in the translation of corporate profiles of China's MNCs? In order to address this problem, this chapter outlines three research objectives based on the narrative approach. It proposed a theoretical framework on narrativity and narrative identity constitution from Margaret Somers (Somers, 1992, 1994, 2008; Somers & Gibson, 1993) and (re)framing strategies in translation from Mona Baker (Baker, 2006, 2007). This is followed by the study's conceptual framework divided into three areas concerning both ends of reframing of narrative in corporate profile translation. This chapter also introduces the scope of research including the sampling and the unit of analysis.

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