



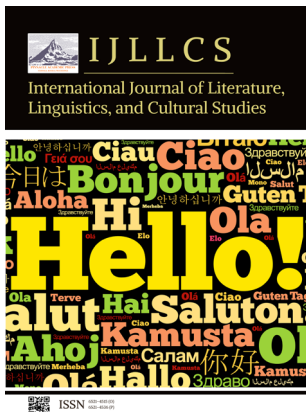
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The Role of English Translation of Northeast Chinese Folktales in the Development of Tourism Culture

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Abstract: Northeastern China is a region rich in cultural and natural tourism assets, offering not only stunning landscapes — such as vast forests, snowy mountains, and tranquil lakes — but also a profound legacy of oral traditions and folktales that reflect the region's unique historical evolution and ethnic diversity. These folktales, passed down through generations, embody local values, social customs, and collective memories. Translating such stories into English is not merely a linguistic task but a strategic cultural endeavor. It can significantly broaden the international appeal of the region, attract a diverse range of global tourists, and contribute to the global recognition of Northeast China's intangible cultural heritage. Furthermore, the dissemination of these tales enhances intercultural dialogue, deepens visitors' understanding of Chinese local cultures, and enriches their travel experience by providing emotional and intellectual engagement. As a result, folklore translation becomes an effective tool for cultural diplomacy, tourism development, and public education.

Keywords: Northeast Chinese folktales; English translation; tourism culture development

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1. Introduction

In recent decades, the global rise of the leisure era has profoundly transformed travel behaviors. Increasingly, individuals are stepping beyond the confines of their daily lives, both domestically and internationally, to explore diverse landscapes, experience novel cultures, and seek meaningful leisure experiences [1]. Tourism has thus become not only a significant economic sector but also a crucial cultural exchange platform, fostering mutual understanding and appreciation among peoples worldwide.

Within this global context, Northeast China stands out as a region blessed with extraordinary natural beauty and rich cultural heritage. The area's majestic landscapes — ranging from the pristine volcanic lakes of Wudalianchi to the towering peaks of Changbai Mountain, the expansive waters of Jingpo Lake, and the historically significant Yalu River — offer visitors breathtaking scenery crafted over millennia by nature's forces. These attractions have increasingly drawn the attention of both domestic travelers and an expanding number of international tourists, prompting local governments and tourism operators to enhance infrastructure, improve service quality, and promote sustainable development.

However, beyond the visual splendor of mountains and waters, Northeast China possesses an invaluable cultural asset: a vast corpus of folktales that reflect the region's historical experiences, social values, and spiritual worldviews. These stories — ranging from joyous legends to haunting myths and poignant anecdotes — have been orally transmitted through generations, enriching the collective memory of local communities and

adding profound layers of meaning to the physical landscapes they inhabit [2]. Folktales not only entertain but also serve as cultural repositories that embody the identity, ethics, and imagination of the Northeast people.

Despite the region's efforts to attract international visitors, there remains a notable gap in enabling foreign tourists to fully appreciate this intangible heritage. As of 2024, China has welcomed nearly 27 million international tourists, yet many remain unfamiliar with the cultural narratives intertwined with Northeast China's natural attractions. The translation of these folktales into English, therefore, represents a critical avenue for bridging this cultural divide. Such translation efforts can transform passive sightseeing into immersive cultural experiences, enhancing tourists' spiritual enrichment and fostering deeper intercultural understanding.

This study aims to explore the pivotal role that English translations of Northeast Chinese folktales play in tourism culture development. By analyzing how these narratives contribute to enhancing destination appeal, reinforcing regional cultural identity, and enriching tourists' moral and spiritual engagement, the paper underscores the importance of integrating folklore translation into sustainable tourism strategies. Ultimately, this research highlights how the symbiotic relationship between natural beauty and cultural storytelling can propel Northeast China's tourism industry onto the global stage, cultivating a tourism culture that is as rich in meaning as it is in scenery.

2. Enhancing Destination Visibility Through Translated Folktales

To effectively promote tourism in Northeast China, it is essential to understand the primary channels through which tourists — particularly international ones — access travel information [3]. Studies indicate that online platforms, personal recommendations, and travel guides serve as key sources for trip planning, yet these often offer only generic introductions to destinations. While the "China Travel Guide" may introduce the geography, local customs, and notable landmarks, such descriptions lack emotional engagement or cultural uniqueness.

In contrast, many tourist sites in Northeast China are closely associated with rich and distinctive folktales. For instance, the mystic tales of Changbai Mountain, the volcanic legends of Wudalianchi, and the mythical origins of Jingpo Lake are all steeped in regional cultural memory. Translating these stories into English and integrating them into promotional materials — whether in brochures, mobile apps, or immersive videos — can provide tourists with a narrative lens through which to experience the landscape [4].

Such storytelling serves a dual purpose: it enhances emotional resonance and transforms cultural heritage into a marketable tourism resource. When international travelers read these translated narratives before or during their visit, they are not merely spectators of natural beauty; they become participants in a living story [5]. This emotional engagement elevates Northeast China's visibility in the global tourism market and repositions it as a destination not just for sightseeing, but for cultural exploration.

3. Constructing Regional Identity through Storytelling in Tourism

3.1. From Sightseeing to Story-Seeking

Modern tourists are no longer content with superficial sightseeing. They increasingly seek travel experiences that offer cultural depth, emotional resonance, and narrative authenticity. This shift marks a global trend where tourism is no longer about ticking off landmarks, but about understanding the people and stories behind them.

3.2. Folktales as Cultural Vessels

In this context, regional folktales function not merely as entertainment but as vessels of collective memory, embodying the beliefs, struggles, and humor of local communities. Such stories encode regional ethics, historical experiences, and social norms, thus providing a unique cultural lens for outsiders.

3.3. *The Case of Northeast China*

Northeast China, known for its bold, earthy culture and long history as a frontier region, holds a treasure trove of narrative heritage. When translated into English, these tales offer international visitors accessible entry points into the region's complex identity. For example, the widespread "Yangko dance" — a performance that blends lively rhythms, exaggerated movements, and satirical expression — is often seen during festivals. While entertaining on the surface, its historical role as a form of social catharsis born out of economic hardship is often lost without contextual translation [6].

3.4. *Making Culture Coherent: Integrating Stories with Experiences*

Through the translation of origin stories and associated folklore, seemingly isolated cultural elements — such as Yangko dancing, traditional festivals, and regional cuisine — become interconnected. These are no longer fragmented encounters but part of a cohesive narrative ecosystem. For instance, a tourist enjoying jiaozi (dumplings) during the Spring Festival can better appreciate the symbolic value of family reunion if they've read or heard a folktale associated with the festival.

3.5. *Narrative Translation as a Tool of Soft Power*

This integration enhances cultural empathy, strengthens regional branding, and positions Northeast China as a culturally immersive destination. In doing so, translated folklore transcends its traditional boundaries and becomes a strategic instrument — not just for tourism, but for cultural diplomacy and soft power projection.

4. **Inspiring Moral Reflection and Deepening Tourists' Spiritual Experience**

Beyond cultural entertainment, folktales hold significant moral and philosophical weight. These narratives, passed down orally through generations, often contain deep ethical messages that reflect a community's values and worldview. For international tourists, encountering these stories in translated form provides a rare opportunity to engage with the ethical backbone of Northeast Chinese society.

Consider the legend of Changbai Mountain's formation — a powerful tale of courage and sacrifice. The heroine Rijina's bravery in facing the fire demon not only provides a mythical explanation for Heaven Lake's origin, but also encapsulates timeless virtues such as altruism, resilience, and communal duty. These values resonate universally, bridging cultural divides and offering visitors a spiritual takeaway from their journey.

When tourists stand before the real Heaven Lake, already familiar with the legend, their experience becomes profoundly enriched. They are no longer viewing a scenic crater lake but witnessing the physical symbol of a people's moral imagination. The landscape thus gains an emotional and philosophical dimension, fostering meaningful reflection.

Incorporating these translated stories into guidebooks, audio tours, or on-site interpretive signs can transform tourism into a holistic experience — one that nourishes not only the senses, but also the spirit. In this way, tourism in Northeast China becomes a platform for global moral dialogue and mutual understanding [7].

5. **From Cultural Resource to Sustainable Development: A Strategic Perspective**

The strategic integration of folktale translation into tourism development aligns closely with the global shift toward sustainable and culturally responsible tourism. As destinations around the world compete not just in terms of scenery, but also cultural distinctiveness, the ability to narrate one's heritage becomes a decisive factor.

For Northeast China, the translation and dissemination of local folklore can diversify the tourism economy, extend the tourist season, and create new jobs in cultural industries. Moreover, it fosters pride among local communities, encouraging the preservation of traditions. Partnerships between local governments, tourism boards, and academic translators can ensure accuracy, authenticity, and appeal in English renderings.

In the long run, such efforts turn intangible cultural heritage into tangible economic and diplomatic capital. Northeast China, with its reservoir of folktales and vivid cultural traditions, is uniquely positioned to harness this potential.

6. Conclusion

Northeast Chinese folktales are more than just imaginative stories passed down through generations — they constitute a rich and multifaceted body of intangible cultural heritage. These narratives encapsulate the spirit, history, and worldview of the region's people, reflecting their values, resilience, and relationship with the natural world. They not only recount how communities interpreted the mysteries of their environment but also serve as powerful vehicles for transmitting moral codes and social norms. From tales of heroic self-sacrifice to fables explaining the origins of natural landmarks, these stories are imbued with emotional resonance and cultural depth.

In the context of tourism development, these folktales offer significant strategic value. When translated into English and thoughtfully integrated into tourism experiences — whether through brochures, multimedia guides, performances, or cultural exhibitions — they transcend mere linguistic conversion. Instead, they become *cultural bridges* that connect international visitors to the local ethos, enriching their journey with narrative meaning and emotional connection. Through these tales, tourists move beyond passive observation of Northeast China's scenic wonders; they engage in a more profound form of cultural immersion that fosters empathy, curiosity, and cross-cultural dialogue.

Moreover, such translations help reposition the region on the global tourism map — not just as a destination of natural beauty, but as a center of unique cultural storytelling. The folktales thus function as cultural ambassadors, narrating the identity of Northeast China to the world. Their global dissemination can play a vital role in nation branding, heritage diplomacy, and the diversification of the tourism economy.

Importantly, the translation and international presentation of these folktales should be approached not as isolated literary tasks, but as part of a comprehensive, long-term strategy for sustainable tourism. This entails collaboration between cultural scholars, translators, local communities, and tourism practitioners to ensure authenticity, sensitivity, and relevance in the retelling of these narratives. By doing so, Northeast China not only safeguards its intangible heritage but also revitalizes it — transforming oral traditions into dynamic, globally resonant cultural assets.

In sum, the English translation of Northeast Chinese folktales is far more than a linguistic endeavor; it is a visionary cultural investment. It enables the region to share its stories with the world, cultivate deeper tourist engagement, and chart a path toward a more inclusive, ethical, and heritage-rich tourism future.

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