

Cultural-loaded Information Transfer in Shaanxi ICH Short-video Translation

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Abstract: As a mainstream new media carrier, short videos greatly facilitate the international dissemination of Chinese intangible cultural heritage (ICH). Shaanxi's representative ICH resources, including shadow puppetry and Qinqiang opera, rely heavily on subtitle translation for overseas communication, yet face prominent cross-cultural translation challenges. Restricted by limited screen space and fragmented audience viewing habits, short-video subtitles often fail to accurately transmit diverse culture-loaded information, causing cultural distortion and loss. Adopting a qualitative case study method, this paper selects typical subtitle cases of Shaanxi ICH short videos to summarize three core translation problems: blind literal translation, excessive cultural simplification and insufficient contextual supplementation. Combined with domestication and foreignization theories, this study proposes targeted optimization strategies with concise contextual supplementation, aiming to balance cultural authenticity and audience acceptability. It provides practical references for the external translation and international communication of regional ICH short videos.

Keyword: Audiovisual Translation; Cultural-Loaded Information; Short-Video Subtitle Translation; Shaanxi Intangible Cultural Heritage; Cross-Cultural Communication.

1. Introduction

The booming development of new media has made short videos a dominant channel for cross-cultural communication and cultural external publicity. With intuitive visualization, low dissemination threshold and fragmented reading adaptability, short videos have become the most effective medium for promoting traditional Chinese culture to global audiences. Regional intangible cultural heritage, as a unique cultural symbol, carries local history, folk customs and aesthetic connotations, serving as a core part of

China's cultural external communication.

Shaanxi Province boasts abundant distinctive ICH resources, among which shadow puppetry and Qinqiang opera are the most representative local cultural brands with high overseas communication value. Nevertheless, subtitle translation has become a major bottleneck restricting their international dissemination. Different from traditional textual translation, short-video subtitle translation is constrained by time and space limits, requiring extreme conciseness while conveying complete cultural information. Most existing studies focus on traditional film subtitle translation or national ICH translation, while targeted research on Shaanxi regional ICH short-video translation is insufficient, lacking systematic analysis of culture-loaded information transmission problems and targeted strategies.

Against the media turn of contemporary audiovisual translation research, multimodal characteristics and audience cognitive habits must be fully considered in short-video subtitle translation. This paper takes publicly released subtitle resources of Shaanxi shadow puppetry and Qinqiang opera short videos as research corpus, summarizes typical defects in culture-loaded information translation, and constructs a three-dimensional optimization strategy system including domestication, foreignization and contextual supplementation. The research results are expected to improve the cross-cultural communication effect of Shaanxi ICH and provide practical reference for regional cultural external translation practice.

2. Theoretical Foundation

Cultural-loaded information refers to unique vocabulary, images and discourse carrying a nation or region's historical traditions, folk customs and spiritual connotations. Such information has no fully equivalent expressions in English, constituting the core difficulty of cross-cultural translation. In ICH communication, cultural-loaded words and images are the core

carriers of regional cultural characteristics, whose accurate translation directly determines the depth and effectiveness of cultural external dissemination.

Domestication and foreignization are two classic and universally applicable translation strategies proposed by Venuti, providing core theoretical support for cultural translation. Domestication adjusts expressions to conform to target language habits and reduce audience reading barriers, while foreignization retains unique cultural symbols to realize cultural output and maintain cultural authenticity. The two strategies are not contradictory but complementary in audiovisual translation practice.

Short-video subtitle translation belongs to multimodal audiovisual translation, which differs greatly from traditional printed text translation. Free from footnote and detailed annotation support, short-video subtitles must balance brevity and information completeness under strict space and time constraints. Translators need to flexibly integrate domestication and foreignization strategies, and properly supplement contextual information to adapt to audiences' fragmented viewing characteristics, realizing effective transmission of culture-loaded information.

3. Research Sample and Methodology

This paper adopts qualitative case study as the main research method, which is suitable for in-depth exploration of practical translation problems in specific scenarios. The research corpus is selected from officially released and high-play-volume Shaanxi ICH short videos on mainstream platforms including Bilibili and YouTube, covering two core and representative categories: Shaanxi shadow puppetry and Qinqiang opera. The collected video contents include traditional craft introduction, folk performance display, cultural popular science and heritage inheritance promotion, which can fully reflect the real situation and existing problems of current regional ICH subtitle external translation.

After systematic screening, comparison and sorting, 12 groups of typical subtitle translation cases with distinctive and representative culture-loaded information are finally selected as the core research objects. These cases cover multiple types of culture load carriers, including folk proper nouns, traditional craft terms, regional custom culture images and local folk

proverbs. All subtitle cases are official open subtitles adopted in public publicity videos, with high authenticity, representativeness and practical value, which can effectively summarize the common and universal problems existing in Shaanxi ICH short-video subtitle translation.

4. Common Problems in the Translation of Culture-loaded Information

4.1 Blind Literal Translation Causes Cross-cultural Understanding Barriers

Most regional ICH culture terms in Shaanxi carry unique historical accumulation and folk connotations exclusive to the Guanzhong region. These culture terms are bred in specific regional folk cultures and have no corresponding equivalent expressions in English vocabulary system. In current subtitle translation practice, many translators adhere to the principle of formal equivalence rigidly and adopt blind literal translation, ignoring the deep culture semantics and emotional connotations behind the vocabulary, resulting in serious semantic vacancy and cross-cultural misunderstanding for overseas audiences who lack Chinese regional culture background. Two typical cases fully reflect this prominent translation problem. The exclusive rhythmic melody of Shaanxi shadow puppetry "Wanwan Tune" is literally translated as "curved tune" in official subtitles. This word-for-word translation only retains the superficial literal form of the vocabulary, but completely fails to reflect its unique folk artistic attribute and professional craft connotation, making overseas audiences unable to recognize this exclusive and characteristic ICH artistic form of Shaanxi.

Similarly, the classic emotional plot "Hukuyuan" in the famous Qinqiang opera Three Drops of Blood is rigidly and mechanically translated as "tiger cage fate". This literal translation only presents the superficial scene and literal information of the vocabulary, completely ignoring the core connotation of fateful and accidental romantic encounter hidden in the plot. Such mechanical and rigid translation cuts off the inherent culture connection and emotional implication of the original work, making overseas audiences confused about the plot development, and finally leading to the double failure of cross-cultural plot understanding and regional culture transmission.

4.2 Excessive Simplification Leads to Cultural Connotation Loss

Constrained by limited screen space, short playing time and fast switching rhythm of short videos, excessive simplification of cultural-loaded information is another prevalent and prominent problem in current ICH subtitle translation. In order to adapt to the concise characteristics of subtitles, many translations blindly delete and simplify cultural information, resulting in the serious loss of core spiritual connotations and folk cultural values of Shaanxi ICH. In shadow puppet craft popular science videos, the traditional craft concept “shadow puppet carving for blessings” with profound folk custom meaning is simply simplified to “shadow puppet carving”. This simplified translation completely omits the traditional folk custom of praying for auspiciousness, peace and good fortune embedded in traditional puppet carving art, only retaining the superficial craft behavior description, and losing the unique spiritual value and folk cultural connotation of Shaanxi traditional folk craft.

In Qinqiang opera popular science and performance short videos, the typical Shaanxi folk proverb “His uncles are all his relatives” with strong local characteristics is over-generalized as “all uncles are the same”. The over-simplified translation completely abandons the unique local dialect humor, simple rustic charm and traditional kinship culture contained in the original folk proverb. The vivid and distinctive regional folk culture is reduced to empty and universal general expression, greatly weakening the local characteristics, artistic charm and cultural uniqueness of Qinqiang opera as a regional intangible cultural heritage.

4.3 Lack of Concise Contextual Cultural Supplementation

Different from traditional textual translation that allows footnotes, endnotes and detailed textual annotations to supplement cultural background, short-video subtitles cannot carry complex and lengthy cultural explanations due to the limitation of display form and space. The general lack of targeted and concise contextual cultural supplementation has become a key obstacle restricting the in-depth cross-cultural communication of Shaanxi ICH. A large number of unique Shaanxi regional ICH cultural symbols and professional craft terms appear in subtitles without any auxiliary cultural explanation,

making overseas audiences only able to grasp the superficial literal meaning of the text, but unable to understand the deep cultural connotation and regional cultural value behind the vocabulary.

For example, the traditional costume prop “jade pendant for blessing”, which frequently appears in various Qinqiang opera short videos, is an important cultural symbol in Guanzhong folk culture. However, there is no any supplementary interpretation in the subtitles, so overseas audiences cannot understand its unique symbolic meanings of praying for good fortune, peace and moral integrity in local folk customs. Similarly, the core craft feature “donkey hide shadow puppet”, as the most representative craft feature of Shaanxi shadow puppetry, is directly displayed in subtitles without any cultural explanation. Donkey hide is a unique and superior raw material exclusive to Shaanxi shadow puppetry, with delicate texture and durable quality, representing the unique craft standard and regional characteristics of local shadow puppet art. The complete absence of contextual supplementation makes overseas audiences unable to distinguish Shaanxi donkey hide shadow puppets from ordinary leather puppets, resulting in superficial and shallow cross-cultural communication effect.

5. Optimization Strategies for Shaanxi ICH Short-video Subtitle Translation

5.1 Appropriate Domestication to Eliminate Cross-cultural Barriers

For highly localized and obscure folk cultural concepts that are difficult for foreign audiences to understand, appropriate domestication strategies should be adopted. On the premise of retaining core cultural connotations, translators can convert exclusive regional expressions into standard English narrative modes to reduce reading barriers. Corresponding to the problematic translation of “Hukuyuan”, the optimized domesticated translation “A Fateful Encounter in Peril” abandons rigid literal meaning, conforms to English literary narrative habits, and accurately conveys the core connotation of fateful romantic encounter, enabling overseas audiences to quickly understand the plot and emotional implication. For simplified translations of Shaanxi folk proverbs, domestication can balance semantic restoration and readability. By adopting

universal kinship expressions in English, the translation retains the original interpersonal meaning while avoiding obscure regional dialect features, effectively improving subtitle acceptability and realizing smooth cross-cultural communication.

5.2 Moderate Foreignization to Retain Regional Cultural Uniqueness

Excessive domestication will erase the exotic characteristics and regional uniqueness of source culture, resulting in the homogenization of cultural expression. Therefore, moderate foreignization is essential for exclusive ICH craft terms, professional artistic vocabulary and unique regional cultural symbols to retain cultural authenticity and realize cultural output. For the mistranslated “Wanwan Tune”, the optimized foreignized translation “Wanwan Tune: unique rhythmic melody of Shaanxi shadow puppetry” retains the original cultural proper noun with local characteristics, and adds simple and concise attribute explanation. This translation preserves the exclusive artistic mark of Shaanxi shadow puppetry and highlights regional cultural uniqueness while ensuring basic audience understanding.

For the core craft term “donkey hide shadow puppet”, the standardized foreignized expression is adopted to completely retain the local material characteristics and exclusive craft attributes of Shaanxi shadow puppetry, which effectively distinguishes it from ordinary leather puppets in other regions. This strategy balances cultural authenticity and audience acceptability perfectly, avoiding the loss of regional cultural characteristics caused by excessive domestication, and realizing effective external output of exclusive regional ICH culture on the basis of ensuring audience comprehension.

5.3 Lightweight Contextual Supplementation for Short-video Scenarios

To solve the problem of incomplete cultural information transmission and shallow cultural communication caused by insufficient explanation, concise and scenario-adaptive lightweight contextual supplementation is necessary for short-video subtitle translation. Different from lengthy academic annotations and professional textual explanations, short-video supplementary interpretation adheres to the lightweight, concise and space-saving principle, which will not occupy limited screen space or

affect the audience’s viewing experience. For the cultural symbol “jade pendant for blessing” in Qinqiang videos, adding a brief supplementary explanation of “symbolizing good fortune and moral integrity in Guanzhong folk culture” can accurately supplement the missing cultural connotation and help overseas audiences understand its folk symbolic value.

For the over-simplified translation of blessing-themed shadow puppet carving, adding the simple supplementary explanation “a traditional craft praying for auspiciousness” can effectively restore the lost traditional folk custom connotation. This lightweight supplementation mode fully adapts to the fragmented viewing characteristics and fast-paced communication characteristics of short videos, realizing the organic unity of subtitle linguistic conciseness and cultural information completeness, and greatly improving the depth and quality of regional ICH cross-cultural communication.

6. Conclusion

Short-video subtitle translation is a key link in the external communication of Shaanxi intangible cultural heritage. At present, the subtitle translation of Shaanxi shadow puppetry and Qinqiang opera short videos mainly suffers from blind literal translation, excessive cultural simplification and insufficient contextual supplementation, which hinder the effective transmission of local cultural-loaded information and restrict cross-cultural communication effects. Combining the media characteristics of short videos and the cultural attributes of regional ICH, this paper proposes three targeted optimization strategies: appropriate domestication to reduce understanding barriers, moderate foreignization to retain cultural characteristics, and lightweight contextual supplementation to complete cultural information transmission.

This study systematically solves the common translation problems of Shaanxi regional ICH short videos, and provides feasible practical guidance for the external translation and international dissemination of local characteristic culture. Limited by the research scale, this paper only selects typical cases for qualitative analysis. Future research can expand the corpus scope and further explore diversified translation strategies for regional ICH audiovisual communication, so as to better promote the international spread of Chinese traditional folk culture.

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