

Translation & Interpretation: A Study on Overseas Promotion of Quanzhou Folk ICH via Short Videos in the New Media Era

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Abstract: Against the backdrop of the vigorous development of new media and the advancement of the “Going Global” cultural strategy, short videos have become a vital channel for the international communication of Quanzhou’s intangible cultural heritage (ICH). Taking the publicity translation of short videos featuring Quanzhou’s folk ICH as the research object and grounded in Skopos Theory, this paper sorts out and analyzes prevalent problems in translated texts, including Chinglish, lexical deviations, inconsistent terminology and cultural mistranslation. Through comparative analysis of typical cases such as the costumes of Hui’an women, hairpin flower customs, Anxi Tieguaanyin culture and Nanyin, this paper explores translation approaches adapted to the communication characteristics of short videos. The research proposes that translation should integrate literal translation with reasonable interpretation to strike a balance between cultural connotation and audience comprehension. The findings can provide practical references for the publicity translation of local ICH via new media in Quanzhou and other regions across China.

1. Introduction

Under the tide of globalization and digitalization, overseas short video platforms have opened up new avenues for the international dissemination of China’s intangible cultural heritage.^[3] As the starting point of the Maritime Silk Road, Quanzhou boasts abundant ICH resources including Nanyin music, Anxi Tieguaanyin tea-making techniques, Hui’an women’s costumes and hairpin flower customs, serving as an important platform for external communication of fine traditional Chinese culture. Nowadays, short videos about Quanzhou’s ICH have gained great popularity overseas. However, relevant publicity translations still suffer from Chinglish, improper word choice, cultural mistranslation and information deviation, which hinder the effective dissemination of local culture.

Skopos Theory consists of three core rules: the skopos rule, the coherence rule and the fidelity

rule. It emphasizes the communicative effect and audience adaptation, which is highly compatible with the features of short videos represented by rapid communication and easy comprehension. Taking the publicity translation of Quanzhou's folk ICH short videos as the research object, this paper sorts out existing translation problems on the basis of Skopos Theory and explores optimized strategies combining translation and interpretation through case analysis. This study aims to improve the quality of translated texts, facilitate the global promotion of Quanzhou's ICH, and offer references for the publicity translation of ICH short videos in other parts of China.

2. Theoretical Foundation

In order to provide reliable theoretical support for the following case analysis and strategy exploration, this part systematically elaborates on the core content of Skopos Theory and its practical significance in publicity translation.

2.1. Skopos Theory

Proposed by German scholar Vermeer in the 1970s, Skopos Theory is the core theory of the German functionalist translation school. It holds that translation is a cross-cultural communicative activity with clear purposes, and translation strategies are determined by the intended function of the target text. This theory breaks the traditional text-centered translation concept and includes three major rules: the skopos rule, the coherence rule and the fidelity rule.

As the primary principle, the skopos principle requires the entire translation process to be guided by communication objectives. The publicity translation of Quanzhou's ICH short videos aims to help overseas audiences understand the connotation of intangible cultural heritage, build cultural identity and realize efficient cross-cultural communication. The coherence rule, namely intratextual coherence, demands that translated texts conform to the expressive habits and logic of the target language with fluent and natural sentences. The fidelity rule, also known as intertextual coherence, requires translations to reproduce the information and cultural connotations of the source text. The degree of fidelity can be flexibly adjusted according to translation objectives and text types.^[4]

2.2. Applicability of Skopos Theory to Publicity Translation

Skopos Theory is highly applicable to the publicity translation of ICH short videos for three reasons. Firstly, it conforms to the focus on audiences and communication effects in publicity translation. Prioritizing communication purposes and audience acceptance, the theory allows translators to adopt flexible expressions on the premise of retaining core cultural connotations, so as to facilitate cultural interpretation and cross-cultural exchanges. Secondly, it adapts to the communication characteristics of short videos such as limited duration, fast rhythm and fragmented audience attention. It guides translators to streamline content and simplify expressions to create easy-to-understand subtitles. Thirdly, it balances cultural accuracy and linguistic naturalness. ICH is rich in regional cultural elements. The three rules establish clear translation criteria, which can not only avoid comprehension barriers caused by literal translation, but also prevent cultural distortion due to excessive adaptation. Therefore, Skopos Theory serves as a sound theoretical support for the international communication of intangible cultural heritage.^[1]

3. Current Situation and Problems of Publicity Translation

With reference to relevant materials and video resources, this section sorts out the development status of Quanzhou intangible cultural heritage short videos and analyzes typical errors in their

translated subtitles.

3.1. Current Situation of Publicity and Communication

At present, overseas short video platforms such as TikTok and YouTube have become major channels for the external communication of Quanzhou's intangible cultural heritage. Content concerning Nanyin music, Anxi Tieguanyin tea culture, Hui'an women's folk customs and hairpin flower traditions is widely disseminated in the forms of skill demonstrations, character stories and folk activities. Cultural and tourism authorities, media organizations and self-media creators jointly participate in content production to promote Quanzhou's ICH overseas. Nevertheless, the relevant communication is still in the initial stage, featuring spontaneity and lack of systematic planning. The quality of translations varies greatly, and there is a shortage of unified standards and professional guidance, making it difficult to form a mature and efficient international communication system.^[2]

3.2. Major Problems

During the process of screening and organizing subtitle texts, many typical translation mistakes have been discovered. These problems will be categorized and discussed one by one in the following chapters.

3.2.1 Prominent Chinglish Expressions

Chinglish is a common and typical problem in international publicity translation. Fundamentally, translators adopt Chinese thinking patterns and sentence structures mechanically in English translation, ignoring the concise, objective and logical characteristics of the English language. Consequently, the translated texts sound stiff, unnatural and hard to read. Word-for-word literal translation only realizes superficial linguistic correspondence, yet neglects the inherent logic and idiomatic usage of languages, bringing difficulties or even obstacles to comprehension for overseas readers. For example, a descriptive Chinese passage about daily rural life is translated as: In quiet moments, she sits in the courtyard weaving fishing nets, the threads wind and cross, and life moves forward in circles of its own. The vivid Chinese expression describing tangled looping motions is literally rendered as “wind and cross”, which constitutes typical Chinglish. Though the translation aligns with the source text word by word, it fails to follow standard English collocations, sounds awkward and weakens the overall expressive impact.

3.2.2 Improper Word Choice and Inconsistent Professional Terminology

Inaccurate word selection and inconsistent use of professional terms are frequent problems in international publicity translation. Translators often fail to take into account the actual meanings, collocations and stylistic features of words in English contexts, and translate literally according to their Chinese interpretations, resulting in improper diction and semantic errors. Moreover, the lack of unified standards for industry terms and culture-specific expressions leads to various versions for the same concept, which easily confuses overseas audiences. For example, one Chinese statement describing Anxi's tea plantations and wildlife resources has been rendered as “Anxi is inlaid with 600,000 mu (400 square kilometers) of tea gardens, with 940 kinds of plants and 258 types of wild animals”. The verb corresponding to the original Chinese word meaning “possess” is translated as “be inlaid with”, which is not in line with common English usage. Such improper word choice makes the translation vague and unnatural.

3.2.3 Cultural Mistranslation and Information Deviation

Cultural mistranslation is a subtle but profoundly influential issue in international publicity translation. It arises from translators' inadequate awareness of cultural differences between China and the West, as well as insufficient understanding of local culture-loaded words and folk customs. Literal translation that disregards underlying cultural connotations will lead to the loss or misinterpretation of cultural information, making it hard for overseas audiences to understand the true meaning. For instance, the sentence "The flowered tradition of the Central Plains journeyed south with them" serves as a faulty rendering of the Chinese line describing the southward spread of the Central Plains hairpin flower custom through population migration. Translating "hairpin flower tradition"—a core intangible cultural heritage term—as "flowered tradition" constitutes a typical case of cultural mistranslation. Mismatched collocation and vague diction obscure the core cultural essence of this folk practice, confusing foreign readers and distorting the cross-cultural transmission of cultural information.

4. A Comparative Analysis of Original and Optimized Translations

This paper selects typical cases from the publicity translation of Quanzhou's ICH short videos. Combined with the three rules of Skopos Theory, it conducts comparative analysis on source texts, original translations and revised translations to summarize existing problems and put forward optimization ideas.

4.1. Optimization Strategies for Improper Word Choice under the Guidance of the Skopos Rule

Case 1: Hairpin Flower Custom

Original Translation: Every year on the ninth day of the ninth lunar month, it is the day when Mazu, the goddess, ascended to heaven. At this moment, we would put flowers on our heads to welcome the arrival of this day.

Revised Translation: Every year on the ninth day of the ninth lunar month, it is the day when Mazu, the goddess, ascended to heaven. At this moment, we would adorn our hair with flowers to welcome the arrival of this day.

Analysis: This text is a subtitle of short videos about the folk custom of pinning flowers for Mazu worship, a local intangible cultural heritage in southern Fujian. The core goal of publicity translation is to spread regional ICH symbols and help overseas audiences understand the flower-pinning custom and Mazu worship culture. The phrase "put flowers on our heads" in the original translation only describes the simple act of placing flowers on the head. It is a plain expression that fails to reflect the aesthetic value embodied in the flower-pinning tradition of Xunpu. Overseas audiences can only interpret it as a casual action rather than recognizing it as a distinctive folk custom. By contrast, the revised version uses the expression "adorn our hair with flowers". The verb "adorn" accurately defines the nature of flower pinning as ceremonial decoration, distinguishing it from random flower placement and presenting the true features of this traditional hair ornament of southern Fujian. It also embodies the simple and vibrant vitality of local women in southern Fujian. The revised translation enables overseas audiences to perceive that flower pinning is more than a simple decoration, but a folk ritual passed down for generations in southern Fujian, so as to accurately understand Mazu worship culture and the heritage value of Xunpu ICH. It fully complies with the requirements of the skopos rule.

Case 2: Introduction to Hui'an Women's Costumes

Original Translation: The classic look of Hui'an women includes four parts: a yellow bamboo

hat, a patterned scarf, a short top and wide-leg trousers.

Revised Translation: The classic look of Hui'an women includes four parts: a yellow bamboo hat, a floral headscarf, a short top and wide-leg trousers.

Analysis: This text is the publicity content of short videos introducing the intangible cultural heritage costumes of Hui'an women. The core purpose of its English translation is to spread regional cultural symbols and help overseas audiences understand related folk customs. The original version adopts vague and generalized expressions to describe the exclusive decorative headwear of Hui'an women. The term “patterned scarf” only refers to common accessories with general decorative patterns and fails to reflect the unique cultural attributes of this iconic folk costume. Such ambiguous wording weakens the distinctive features of intangible cultural heritage and deviates from the goal of cross-cultural communication, making it difficult for overseas audiences to identify the exclusive costume symbols of Hui'an folk culture. In contrast, the revised translation adopts the expression “floral headscarf”. The word “headscarf” accurately defines the exclusive attribute of this traditional head ornament, while the adjective “floral” precisely depicts its typical flower pattern features. The optimized expression conforms to the authentic characteristics of local costume culture and completely retains the exclusive cultural symbols of Hui'an intangible heritage. It enables overseas audiences to accurately perceive southern Fujian folk characteristics and effectively achieves the publicity and communication purpose of cross-cultural translation, which fully conforms to the skopos rule.

4.2. Optimization Strategies for Redundant Sentences and Misplaced Literal Translation under the Guidance of the Coherence Rule

Case 1: Promotion of Anxi Culture

Original Translation: I'll be your guide to appreciate the unique cultural charm of Anxi's “Three Irons and Three World Heritages”.

Revised Translation: I'll be your guide to appreciate the unique cultural charm of Anxi's “Three Tie and Three World Heritages”.

Analysis: This text is used for promoting regional ICH tourism in Anxi. In accordance with the coherence rule, translated texts should conform to the expressive logic of the target language, eliminate cognitive barriers caused by culture-specific terms, and ensure semantic coherence for overseas audiences to understand local folk concepts smoothly. The original translation literally renders the regional short name “San Tie” as “Three Irons”, which literally means three pieces of iron. This translation is completely divorced from the actual connotations referring to Tieganyin tea, rattan iron craft and iron smelting techniques. It leads to semantic disruption and destroys intratextual coherence as overseas audiences cannot associate the phrase with relevant intangible cultural heritage. The revised translation adopts the transliteration “Three Tie” to retain the exclusive local appellation, avoiding semantic misunderstanding caused by literal translation and removing obstacles to cross-cultural comprehension. The revised version balances the characteristics of proper nouns and English reading logic, allowing audiences to learn more about related ICH based on the name. It realizes semantic coherence of the text and meets the standards of the coherence rule.

Case 2: Introduction to the Features of Anxi Tieganyin

Original Translation: It is world-famous for its unique “Guanyin Yun” (a lingering aftertaste) and orchid-like aroma. And this craft was recognized by UNESCO as an Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in 2022.

Revised Translation: It is world-famous for its unique lingering aftertaste and orchid-like aroma. This craft was recognized by UNESCO as an Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in 2022.

Analysis: This passage is publicity content for short videos introducing the intangible cultural heritage of Anxi Tieguanyin tea-making techniques. In accordance with the coherence rule, subtitle translation needs to adapt to the fragmented viewing characteristics of short videos, ensure coherent logic and concentrated information, and reduce the audience's reading burden. The original translation retains the pinyin "Guanyin Yun" followed by an explanation. Restricted by the layout of short video screens, the pinyin and its explanation are displayed separately, breaking the semantic connection and increasing comprehension difficulties for overseas audiences. The revised translation directly uses the explanatory content to replace the pinyin of the proper noun and streamlines the text, making sentences cohesive and concise. The optimized version is concise and easy to understand, adapting to the instantaneous reading feature of short videos and realizing intratextual coherence, which complies with the requirements of the coherence rule.

4.3. Optimization Strategies for Cultural Mistranslation and Information Deviation under the Guidance of the Fidelity Rule

Case 1: Introduction to the History of Nanyin Music

Original Translation: It's one of the oldest existing musical forms in China, with a history of thousands of years, which is called a "Living Fossil" of Chinese musical history.

Revised Translation: It's one of the oldest existing musical forms in China, with a history of more than one thousand years, which is called a "Living Fossil" of Chinese musical history.

Analysis: This text is an explanatory script of short videos introducing the historical development of Nanyin, a precious intangible cultural heritage. The fidelity rule requires translations to faithfully reproduce all objective information of the source text without arbitrarily adding, deleting or exaggerating data, so as to maintain high consistency between the original and translated texts. The phrase "thousands of years" in the original translation means several thousand years, which greatly exaggerates the history of Nanyin and distorts the objective data in the source text. Consequently, it fails to convey the true historical development of Nanyin. The revised translation uses "more than one thousand years", which strictly follows the numerical description of the source text and accurately presents the true history of Nanyin. The revised translation adheres to the information boundaries of the source text and faithfully reproduces historical facts, achieving intertextual fidelity and satisfying the criteria of the fidelity rule.

Case 2: Origin of the Hairpin Flower Culture

Original Translation: The "Zanhua", or hairpin flower, is a traditional Chinese ornament worn in the hair, dating back to ancient times.

Revised Translation: The "Zanhua", or hairpin flower, is a traditional Chinese ornament worn in the hair, dating back to the Pre-Qin period.

Analysis: This is an explanatory text from short videos that introduces the origin of the hairpin flower intangible cultural heritage. The fidelity rule requires translators to faithfully reproduce the content of the original text and accurately restore key details including history and culture so as to keep the translated text consistent with the original one. The revised translation employs the widely recognized academic label "Pre-Qin period" to pinpoint the specific historical timeframe and fully preserve the temporal information laid out in the source text. This refined rendering rigorously abides by the original historical facts and maintains intertextual coherence, fully satisfying the standards of the fidelity rule.

5. Conclusions

Based on Skopos Theory, this paper analyzes common problems in the publicity translation of Quanzhou's ICH short videos, including Chinglish, improper word choice, inconsistent terminology

and cultural mistranslation through targeted case studies. The research holds that such translation should not be limited to literal conversion. Translators should stay true to the communication mission and adopt the strategy combining literal translation with reasonable interpretation to take into account audience habits, communication features and cultural authenticity.

The three rules of Skopos Theory can effectively guide translation practices: the skopos rule clarifies the communication orientation, the coherence rule adapts to the characteristics of communication forms, and the fidelity rule safeguards core cultural connotations. Optimizing translation methods and standardizing terminology can significantly improve the communication effect of translated texts. The research results can provide references for the publicity translation of local intangible cultural heritage and help Chinese culture go global.

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