

Vivification in Subtitle Translation Based on Three-Dimensional Transformation

—A Case Study of Chinese Micro-Documentary *On the Tail of the Chinese Dragon*

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Abstract

Under China's "Go Global" strategy for its culture, subtitle translation in audiovisual works serves as a vital nexus for cross-cultural communication, with its quality profoundly shaping the construction of national cultural image. This study, based on the three-dimensional transformation principle of Eco-translatology, takes *On the Tail of the Chinese Dragon*, a cultural micro-documentary produced by China Media Group (CCTV), as a case study. It investigates how the translator amplifies the vividness and appeal of subtitles through adaptive selection across linguistic, cultural, and communicative dimensions, thereby rendering Chinese culture more accessible to and resonant with global audiences. Through interdisciplinary narrative techniques, such as multi-line storytelling and the intertwining of time and space, the documentary explores the historical origin and development of Chinese dragon culture, providing a new example for subtitle translation in cultural documentaries. This study aims to offer valuable insights into the practice of subtitle translation in audiovisual works.

Keywords

Eco-Translatology, Three-Dimensional Transformation, Subtitle Translation, Vivification

1. Introduction

As an ancient Chinese maxim states, "A nation's soul is forged and sustained through its culture." In the globalized digital era, international cultural exchanges have evolved from unidirectional dissemination to multidimensional interactions.

Film and television works, with their accessibility, popularity, and entertainment value, have become important strategic mediums for constructing national images and promoting cultural soft power. Through compelling visual narratives and sophisticated subtitle translation, film and television works transcend linguistic barriers, offering target audiences an immersive cultural experience that fosters cross-cultural understanding. The efficacy of subtitle translation thus critically determines the global reach and cultural impact of media products, playing a pivotal role in enhancing national soft power and preserving cultural diversity.

Patricio Guzmán, a Chilean documentary director, once said that, “A country without documentaries is like a family without a photo album.” Documentaries, blending factual accuracy with artistry, serve as an essential vehicle for recording and showcasing a nation’s natural landscape, historical changes, social development, political culture, and customs. They are key to preserving collective memory and shaping national identity (Chen, 2019). In recent years, Chinese documentaries have innovated in their narrative styles, combining traditional cultural elements with modern internet trends, achieving an ecological balance between development and heritage. These documentaries not only integrate traditional culture into a modern context but also meet the aesthetic demands and viewing expectations of contemporary audiences, effectively promoting the global dissemination of China’s outstanding traditional culture (Qiu & Xie, 2019).

In early 2024, the China Media Group (CCTV) launched a micro-documentary series titled *On the Tail of the Chinese Dragon* to celebrate the Year of the Dragon. This seven-episode series, each about five minutes long, employs a personified narrative approach, with “Longlong” (龙龙) as the first-person perspective. Integrating multiple disciplines such as literature, history, biology, and archaeology, the documentary presents a rich tapestry of visual imagery and humorous storytelling. Through Longlong’s self-narration, the series guides viewers through relics, ancient texts, historical sites, modern art, and high-tech innovations, showcasing the evolution and cultural significance of the Chinese dragon, while reflecting on the vast and profound history of Chinese civilization. This unique and innovative narrative style not only enhances the entertainment and interactivity of the documentary but also ensures the accurate transmission of cultural information, helping it stand out among other documentaries and receive widespread acclaim from both domestic and international audiences.

However, this distinctive presentation poses novel challenges for subtitle translators. As Hu (2008) proposed in Eco-translatology, translation constitutes “a cyclic process of translator-centered adaptation and selection”. Translators function as pivotal agents within translation ecological environment, constantly optimizing their choices in translation practice to adapt to different translation contexts and meet the diverse needs of target audiences. Subtitle translation, as an important branch of translation, plays an irreplaceable role in international cultural communication. In documentary subtitle translation, the translator should find a dynamic balance between accurately conveying the narrative’s original meaning and

ensuring an optimal viewing experience for the audience, so that subtitles are both readable and capable of engaging international audiences in a deeper understanding of the works' cultural implications. Therefore, research on documentary subtitle translation holds academic significance and practical value, contributing to discussions on how to overcome language and cultural differences in the context of globalization, enhance the cross-cultural communication effect of films, and more effectively showcase the cultural appeal of the Chinese nation to the international community, fostering exchange and mutual learning between different nations and cultures.

Based on this, this study applies the theoretical framework of Eco-translatology to analyze bilingual subtitles in the documentary *On the Tail of the Chinese Dragon*. Through case studies of translation examples, it investigates how translators navigate fidelity to the original intent while employing vivification translation strategy to enhance textual liveliness and emotional resonance. By crafting a vibrant, dynamic, and appealing image of China through subtitling, the study aims to stimulate profound international interest in Chinese culture, ultimately offering novel perspectives and empirical evidence for audiovisual translation practices.

2. Vivification Strategy from the Perspective of Eco-Translatology

The theory of Eco-translatology provides a new interdisciplinary perspective for the study of film subtitle translation. This theory emphasizes that translation is fundamentally a dynamic process in which the translator adapts to the translation ecological environment and makes adaptive selections. This process is primarily reflected in the conversion practices across the linguistic, cultural, and communicative dimensions. The vivification translation strategy, based on this framework, further focuses on the emotional impact and dissemination effect of the translated text, highlighting the creative transformation that achieves a vivid representation of the source culture.

2.1. Eco-Translatology and Three-Dimensional Transformation

Since the shift from industrial civilization to ecological civilization in the 1960s, ecological thought has gradually permeated the field of social science research. Professor Hu Gengshen of Tsinghua University developed the theoretical framework of Eco-translatology based on the "Translation as Adaptation and Selection (TAS)". This theory draws on ecological principles, integrates traditional Chinese ecological wisdom, and establishes a new paradigm for indigenous translation studies (Hu, 2010).

Eco-translatology defines translation as "the translator's adaptive selection activity within the translation ecological environment" (Hu, 2008). Translation activities are no longer confined to the linguistic equivalence at the textual level, but instead integrate multiple elements such as language, culture, communication, so-

ciety, authors, readers into an organic ecosystem. This system is characterized by its holistic, dynamic, and interrelated nature, with each ecological element interdependent and mutually constraining, collectively maintaining the dynamic balance of the translation ecology. The core principle of TAS theory can be summarized as “multidimensional adaptation and adaptive selection”, which means that, in the translation process, the translator strives for multidimensional adaptation across different levels and aspects of the translation ecological environment and makes adaptive selections accordingly (Hu, 2008). The translation method can be briefly summarized as three-dimensional transformation, focusing on adaptive selection conversions in the linguistic, cultural, and communicative dimensions under the principle of “multidimensional adaptation and adaptive selections”.

The linguistic dimension focuses on the conversion and application of lexical, grammatical, and syntactic features; the cultural dimension emphasizes the transmission and exchange of cultural elements such as values, social customs, ways of thinking, and historical traditions under different cultural contexts; and the communicative dimension focuses on the function, intention, and audience acceptance of the text in specific communicative contexts (Hu, 2006). To achieve a dynamic balance between the source and target language ecosystems, the translator needs to adopt corresponding translation strategies in each dimension: in the linguistic dimension, selecting vocabulary and grammatical structures that conform to the target language’s expression habits; in the cultural dimension, ensuring the accurate transmission of cultural elements and avoiding cultural conflicts; and in the communicative dimension, ensuring the realization of the text’s function in specific contexts. This multidimensional adaptive selection provides systematic theoretical guidance for the subtitle translation of film and television works.

2.2. Vivification Translation Strategy

The immediacy, mass appeal, and colloquial nature of audiovisual language impose unique demands on subtitle translation, necessitating a balance between information density, artistic expressiveness, and cultural adaptability within spatial and temporal constraints (Sun, 2011). However, traditional subtitle translation often overemphasizes surface-level equivalence, leading to the loss of cultural image and emotional resonance. For instance, the direct translation of “江湖” (jianghu) in martial arts films as “rivers and lakes” fails to convey its profound cultural connotations of martial society and chivalric ethos. As this Chinese culture concept transcends geographical denotation, a contextualized translation like “martial arts world” proves more appropriate. Similarly, rendering the slang “拍马屁” (paimapi) literally as “pat the horse’s butt” risks misinterpretation, whereas adopting English idiomatic expressions like “flattery” or “brown-nosing” better preserves communicative intent. These examples illustrate the limitations of conventional linguistic equivalence in cross-cultural communication, underscoring the need for more audience-oriented translation strategies. Translators must not

only accurately convey meaning but also creatively reconstruct messages in ways that align with the target culture, ensuring precise information transfer while fostering emotional engagement with the audience.

Eco-translatology conceptualizes translation as a process of adaptive selection by the translator within a specific translation ecological environment, emphasizing the reconstruction of ecological balance in the target text through multidimensional creative transformations (Hu, 2020). Building on this theoretical framework and considering the distinctive nature of subtitle translation, this study proposes the vivification translation strategy. Guided by the three-dimensional transformation principle, adaptive selections are made in the three dimensions of language, culture, and communication to enhance the expressiveness, cultural adaptability, and emotional resonance of the translated text, and to achieve the regeneration of the source language culture in target-language ecosystems.

Specifically, in the linguistic dimension, the vivification translation strategy transcends rigid word-for-word equivalence by optimizing lexical choices (e.g., avoiding terms with sensitive religious/political connotations), restructuring syntax (e.g., converting passive to active voice), and employing rhetorical devices (e.g., retaining parallel structures in Chinese). Such adaptive selections enhance the fluency and idiomaticity of the translation. For example, “神物” (shenwu) can be rendered as “mystical creature” rather than a literal translation, thereby preventing potential cultural misinterpretations (see Section 3.3.1, Example 2). Given the immediacy and accessibility requirements of subtitles, this strategy also employs colloquial expressions (e.g., inserting modal particles) and rhythm control (e.g., simplifying complex sentences) to improve readability and audience engagement.

In the cultural dimension, the strategy prioritizes adaptive selections to the target audience’s cultural background, ensuring both the preservation of source culture distinctiveness and enhanced comprehensibility. To address cultural symbol vacancy (e.g., divergent connotations of “dragon” in Chinese and Western cultures) and cognitive barriers (e.g., words/idioms with Chinese characteristics), this strategy integrates literal translation with annotations, contextual compensation, and image conversion. Such techniques help align the translated content with the cognitive framework of the target audience, minimizing cultural misinterpretations and enhancing the transmission of cultural messages.

In the communicative dimension, the strategy emphasizes emotional expression and interaction, ensuring that subtitles effectively convey the tone and sentiment of the original text. By adapting context (e.g., simplifying complex technical terms), adjusting tone (e.g., localizing humor), and reinforcing emotional language (e.g., using affective words like “revered” or “adored”), the translation fosters a stronger emotional connection between the audience and the text. This ensures that subtitles not only faithfully convey the source text’s information but also resonate emotionally within the target culture, facilitating deeper cross-cultural engagement.

In summary, the vivification translation strategy, through the adaptive selections made by translators, can achieve natural linguistic fluency, effective transmission of cultural imagery, and the construction of emotional resonance. Furthermore, it can also strengthen the international dissemination power of audio-visual works, contributing to the creation of a distinctive and vivid national cultural image and the enhancement of a nation's cultural soft power.

3. Case Study: CCTV Documentary *On the Tail of the Chinese Dragon*

This study focuses on the documentary *On the Tail of the Chinese Dragon* as its research subject. Through an in-depth analysis of its creative concepts, narrative techniques, and translation practices, the study explores how the translator, based on the three-dimensional transformation principle, integrates the vivification translation strategy to achieve accurate transmission and effective dissemination of cultural connotations. The study finds that the documentary's innovative narrative approach and the translation strategies employed not only effectively conveyed the essence of Chinese dragon culture but also significantly enhanced the emotional appeal and acceptance of the cultural transmission, providing practical experience and theoretical insights for the international spread of Chinese culture.

3.1. Brief Introduction to *On the Tail of the Chinese Dragon*

The Report to the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China underscored the importance of strengthening China's narrative capacity to present a credible, appealing, and respectable national image. In recent years, humanistic documentaries have emerged as an important medium for cultural communication, marked by significant advancements in quality and thematic diversity (Qiu & Xie, 2019). Notable examples include *Amazing China* (winner of the 30th News & Documentary Emmy Award.), *Seasons of China* (whose short videos on solar terms have garnered over 50 million views on overseas social media platforms), and *A Bite of China* (recipient of Gourmand World Cookbook Awards). These documentaries delve into China's natural landscapes, culinary traditions, festivals, and regional identities, providing an immersive perspective on the nation's rich cultural heritage and distinctive charm, earning widespread international recognition. Inspired by these landmark productions, documentary filmmaking in China has not only expanded in thematic scope but has also continuously innovated in narrative techniques. A compelling example is *On the Tail of the Chinese Dragon*, which employs an innovative blend of first-person and third-person narration. Centered around the self-narration of "Longlong", an anthropomorphic dragon character, the documentary explores the dragon's origins and evolution through mythological legends, archaeological discoveries, and biological research, offering a multidimensional perspective on this cultural icon.

The creative team states that the documentary centers on the vivid narration of the dragon as a cultural symbol, using a narrative strategy that combines both

micro and macro perspectives to deeply explore its historical context and humanistic significance. The creation process places particular emphasis on telling each story in a lively and efficient manner, balancing subjective and objective viewpoints while enhancing audience immersion (Wang, 2024). On one hand, the first-person narration of the anthropomorphized character “Longlong” creates an immersive experience, allowing the audience to feel as though they are embarking on a journey to uncover the mysteries of the dragon. On the other hand, the third-person objective perspective, combined with empirical materials such as archaeological findings and biological research, adds authority and academic depth to the narrative. This documentary also innovatively incorporates elements of youthful expression, such as animated shorts and popular internet slang, breaking the traditional documentary stereotype. Through engaging and playful presentation, abstract totemic symbols are transformed into tangible cultural carriers. All in all, the documentary vividly traces the origin and evolution of the dragon as the sacred totem of the Chinese nation, explaining its cultural significance and national symbolic status. It also provides an engaging and empirical visual reference for the study of national totems, further deepening the audience’s understanding and recognition of the dragon as a cultural symbol.

3.2. Vivid Expression in Source Subtitles

On the Tail of the Chinese Dragon enhances the film’s vibrancy and viewer engagement through innovative narrative strategies, rich visual effects, humorous commentary, and engaging background sound effects. Specifically, the film’s success can be summarized in the following aspects:

1) Timely and Interesting Theme Selection

The Year of the Dragon has made discussions about dragons a new trend. Artifacts, myths, films, and even English translations related to the dragon were widely shared across social platforms at the start of the dragon year (Wang, 2024). As the most mysterious animal in the Chinese zodiac, the dragon is widely known but has never been truly seen. The documentary cleverly seizes the opportunity of the Year of the Dragon to capture and satisfy the public’s curiosity about this national totem, sparking interest in its origins and evolution.

2) First-Person Emotional Resonance

The documentary innovatively adopts the personified character “Longlong” who narrates its millennia-long history in the first-person. This narrative style breathes life into the dragon, making the audience feel as if they are conversing with “Longlong,” sensing its revered status and legendary stories in Chinese culture. For example, in the first episode, “Longlong” introduces itself with a dignified yet humorous tone: “我，伴随你们千年时光，你们尊我、敬我、爱我，可我究竟从哪里来，你们真的知道吗？” (Hello folks! I have been with you through the ages. I am respected, revered, and adored by the Chinese people. But where did I come from, precisely, is something people often ponder.). Such vivid storytelling deepens emotional engagement, breaking the passive viewing mode and

inviting audiences to actively participate in unraveling the dragon's cultural legacy.

3) Humorous and Witty Commentary

The narration interweaves regional dialects, internet slang, and colloquial expressions to enliven cultural content. Examples include: “谁说龙龙不染发，粉彩上身就得怕” (Who says dragons have to be all serious looking? A little blush won't hurt at all.); “这张拍的时候，日光浴做过头了，脸都黑了，不提也罢。” (This one, however, probably had too much suntan and looks a bit over-roasted.); “一些脑回路清奇的先民认为，彩虹是只‘双头龙’在吨吨吨吨吨吨吨” (Some ancestors who thought outside the box believed the rainbow to be a double-headed dragon absorbing vast amounts of water.). This humorous and witty commentary lightens the heaviness of historical knowledge, making complex cultural information more accessible.

4) Rich and Colorful Visual Presentation

The documentary also makes considerable efforts in visual presentation by combining live-action footage, studio recording, and animation, incorporating art forms like paper-cutting, sand painting, and shadow puppetry. It also employs macro and close-up shots to delicately display the grandeur and essence of the dragon. For instance, the scenes of “飞龙在天” (flying dragon in the sky) and “蛟龙得水” (dwelling in the oceans), portrayed through ink wash paintings, were created by renowned Chinese sand artist Zhang Mingcong. Using sand as ink and his hands as brushes, Zhang's unique creativity and superb technique, turning fine sand into intricate visuals, enhance the film's visual appeal and artistic expressiveness.

3.3. Vivification in Target Subtitles Translation

In the translation process of the documentary *On the Tail of the Chinese Dragon*, the translator applied the vivification translation strategy to achieve an ecological balance between the source and target languages from the perspectives of linguistic, culture, and communication. This strategy not only ensured the accurate transmission of the film's content but also endowed the translation with vivid expressiveness, distinctive imagery, and unique appeal, significantly enhancing its acceptability and communicative effectiveness.

3.3.1. Vivid Conversion in the Linguistic Dimension

Due to structural and stylistic differences between Chinese and English, subtitle translation requires adjustments to align with the linguistic and cultural norms of the target language. In the linguistic dimension, translators should select contextually appropriate vocabulary and restructure sentences in accordance with the target language's grammatical conventions (Hu, 2011). At the same time, to preserve rhetorical features of the source text, necessary modifications can be made while retaining its original stylistic essence, enhancing the expressiveness of the translation.

Example 1.

Source subtitle: 我，伴随你们千年时光，你们尊我、敬我、爱我，可我究竟从哪里来，你们真的知道吗？

Target subtitle: Hello folks! I have been with you through the ages. I am respected, revered, and adored by the Chinese people. But where did I come from, precisely, is something people often ponder.

Analysis: Firstly, the translator adds the greeting “Hello folks!” at the beginning of the target subtitle. This greeting not only aligns with English conversational norms but also quickly bridges the gap with the audience, enhancing interaction and making the subtitles more lively and natural. Secondly, in terms of syntactic adjustments, the translator converts the active voice in the Chinese source text into passive voice in English (“I am respected, revered, and adored by...”). This shift conforms to English stylistic conventions, making the translation smoother and more natural. Thirdly, “你们” (you) is specified as “the Chinese people”, which not only clarifies the cultural context but also provides a necessary background for subsequent content, improving comprehension for the target audience. Moreover, the translator restructures the rhetorical question “你们真的知道吗？” into the declarative sentence “But where did I come from, precisely, is something people often ponder”. This adjustment retains the questioning tone of the original sentence, making the delivery more measured and thought-provoking, in line with the documentary’s narrative style.

Example 2.

Source subtitle: 龙，千年走来的图腾，至高无上的神物，中华全民保护动物。

Target subtitle: The supreme mystical creature, a revered totem, and a national treasure of the Chinese civilization.

Analysis: First, the Chinese subtitle employs a parallel structure, using three coordinated phrases—“千年走来的图腾” (a revered totem), “至高无上的神物” (supreme mystical creature), and “中华全民保护动物” (a national treasure of the Chinese civilization) to create a layered rhetorical effect. This not only showcases the phonetic elegance of the Chinese language but also highlights the multifaceted symbolic significance of the dragon in Chinese culture. The translation mirrors this structure by using three parallel noun phrases, preserving the original’s parallelism while ensuring fluency and readability in English. Second, in terms of word order arrangement, the translator places “supreme mystical creature” at the beginning. This adjustment not only highlights the mysterious and supreme qualities of the dragon but also effectively captures the audience’s attention, laying the groundwork for the subsequent explanation of cultural context. Following this, the translator introduces two specific concepts: “revered totem” and “national treasure”. This progression from abstract to concrete expression also aligns with English linguistic preferences and facilitates the target audience’s gradual understanding of the dragon’s special status in Chinese culture. In addition, a particularly noteworthy is the translation of the term “神物”. Given the cultural differences between China and the West, the translator avoids a direct translation such as “divine being”, which could evoke unintended religious connotations, particu-

larly within Christian contexts. Instead, the choice of “supreme mystical creature” ensures that the translation remains culturally neutral while preserving the sense of mystery inherent in the original term. This adaptive selection not only remains faithful to the source culture but also enhances the acceptability of the translation among English-speaking audiences.

3.3.2. Vivid Conversion in the Cultural Dimension

Adaptive selection in the cultural dimension, with particular emphasis on alignment with the cultural perspectives of the target audience. Due to the significant differences between Chinese and Western cultures, one of the primary challenges in translation lies in addressing cultural gaps and cognitive disparities. When discrepancies in cultural connotations exist between the source and target languages, the translator has the responsibility to carefully consider the target audience’s cultural background and cognitive ability to ensure that the translation not only conveys the original cultural essence but also remains naturally comprehensible. This challenge is pronounced when translating culturally rich elements such as historical allusions and idiomatic expressions from Chinese traditions (Sun & Han, 2021). To ensure the effective transmission of cultural imagery, the translator can employ various strategies, including literal translation with annotations, transliteration with explanations, or free translation. Additionally, context reinforcement plays a crucial role—leveraging audiovisual elements in documentaries, such as visuals and synchronized narration, can aid in clarifying cultural references and enhancing comprehension (Li, 2001).

Example 3.

Source subtitle: 没人见过，可所有人又都认为存在的“显眼包”。

Target subtitle: Nobody has seen me, but everyone’s convinced I’m the real deal, the “eye-catching package”.

Analysis: The term “显眼包” is a popular internet slang with distinctive characteristics of the era. In the Chinese context, it does not literally mean “显眼的包裹” (a conspicuous package), but is commonly used to describe a person or object that stands out due to their external appearance or personality traits, often with a playful or affectionate connotation. The translator uses a combination of literal translation and annotation, preserving the image of “eye-catching package” while adding the explanation “the real deal” to accurately convey the deeper meaning of the original text. This strategy not only successfully reproduces the humorous and witty style of the source language but also breathes new life into the traditional cultural symbol of the dragon in the target language context, effectively enhancing the fun and appeal of the translation.

Example 4.

Chinese and English titles of the Chinese version of the documentary: 《来龙去脉》 (*Tales of Loong*)

English title of the English version of the documentary: *On the Trail of the Chinese Dragon*

Analysis: The Chinese title of the documentary, 《来龙去脉》 (*Tales of Loong*),

and its English counterpart, *On the Trail of the Chinese Dragon*, reflect an adaptive translation strategy tailored to different cultural audiences. The idiom “来龙去脉” originally describing the trajectory and orientation of mountain ranges, it now metaphorically refers to the cause and effect of events. In China, “龙” is often transliterated as “Loong” to approximate the pronunciation of the Chinese character “龙” (Long), while in Western contexts, it is typically rendered as “Dragon”. This difference in transliteration and semantic presentation reflects the different cultural cognition of dragons. In Chinese culture, the “龙” (Loong) is revered as an auspicious creature embodying prosperity, nobility, and power, symbolizing imperial authority and serving as a national totem. Conversely, the Western “Dragon” is frequently depicted as a malevolent, avaricious beast representing calamity and destruction.

Given this cultural discrepancy, when translating the English title for the Chinese version of the documentary, the translator prioritized cultural authenticity by retaining the culturally distinctive term “Loong” to denote the Chinese dragon. The addition of “Tales” injects narrative appeal and whimsy. This hybrid translation approach combining transliteration and semantic interpretation helps reduce cultural barriers for global viewers while showcasing Chinese cultural uniqueness, demonstrating cultural self-identification and confidence within globalization. However, to cater to international reception, the English version of documentary’s title makes adaptive cultural transformation. Although the word “Dragon” is still retained, the qualifier “Chinese” directly indicates that the documentary is the tracing and exploration of “Chinese dragon”, which helps the international audience quickly understand the core content of the documentary. Moreover, the phrase “On the Trail” visualizes the dynamic process of pursuit and exploration, enhancing mystique and appeal. Through vivification translation strategy, the translator skillfully balances target-language ecological adaptation, accounting for international audiences’ cultural contexts and cognitive frameworks, with proactive enhancements to increase textual vividness. This strategy not only facilitates cross-cultural comprehension but also invites global viewers to explore the profound connotations of Chinese dragon culture through cinematic storytelling.

3.3.3. Vivid Conversion in the Communicative Dimension

In the communicative dimension, adaptive selections and transformations require translators to go beyond the accurate transmission of linguistic information and cultural connotations. They must also focus on achieving cross-cultural communicative intent, ensuring that the translation aligns with the cultural background, cognitive capacity, and contextual expectations of the target audience (Hu, 2006). To this end, the vivification translation strategy prioritizes the functional role of the translation within specific contexts, emphasizing that the translated text is not merely a vehicle for information but also a bridge for cross-cultural communication. In practice, translators can employ various techniques, such as restructuring sentences to optimize logical flow, adding or omitting information to align with the cognitive habits of the target audience, simplifying complex structures to en-

hance readability, or integrating annotations to provide essential contextual information, so as to promote the emotional resonance between subtitles and the audience.

Example 5.

Source subtitle: 中国科学院的古生物学家们发现了大量蜥蜴，其中包括河套五角蜥、李氏始祖巨蜥等。

Target subtitle: Experts from the Chinese Academy of Sciences found a bunch of lizard fossils.

Analysis: Given the diverse ages and cultural backgrounds of the audience, subtitle translation must be concise, clear, and accessible, aligning with the general cultural expectations of the target viewers. Therefore, in the translation process, translators need to focus on the core communication intention of the subtitles, rather than word-for-word correspondence, to optimize the target audience's understanding experience. For example, although the Chinese subtitle mentions specific types of lizards (“河套五角蜥” *Pentaedrusaurus Ordosianus* and “李氏始祖巨蜥” *Archaeovaranus Lii*), these detailed classifications are omitted in the English subtitle. Because the communicative intent here is to efficiently convey the fact of “discovering multiple lizard fossils” to the international audience, rather than focusing on species taxonomy. Therefore, the translator should concentrate on distilling core information. The simplification of “a bunch of lizard fossils” replaces the intricate Chinese descriptions, effectively reducing comprehension difficulty for target audiences. This approach not only adheres to the principles of conciseness and readability in subtitle translation but also ensures viewers can quickly grasp key content and follow the film's pace. The colloquial expression “a bunch of” further enhances the naturalness of the translation, aligning with target audiences' daily communication habits. Moreover, as an important supplement to the non-verbal information, the visual presentation in the film clearly demonstrates the morphological characteristics of these two lizard species to viewers, which effectively compensates for omitted textual details in subtitles.

Example 6.

Source subtitle: 不论人类还是其他哺乳动物，都是从胚胎中诞生，这胚胎，昭示了生命的共同性，代表了生命的起源。俗话说，留得青山在，不怕没娃带。

Target subtitle: Here are some of the earliest forms of the dragon, rather wild and creative in their looks. This particular one is shaped like an embryo, an indication of the common origin of life. Where there's life, there's hope.

Analysis: The Chinese subtitle creatively adapts the proverb “留得青山在，不怕没柴烧” (Literal: As long as green mountains remain, there will be no shortage of firewood) by replacing “柴火” (firewood) with “娃” (offspring), vividly conveying the message that “as long as life exists, there is hope for continuity and development”. Transcending literal translation, the translator adopts the widely recognized English proverb “Where there's life, there's hope” to precisely articulate the intrinsic link between life and hope, effectively circumventing cultural misunder-

standings while enabling instant audience comprehension. This vivid adaptation retains the original proverb's philosophical essence while harmonizing with the documentary's visual scene of a "the changing shape of the dragon in the embryo". The embryo symbolizes the origin of life, and the dragon's evolving forms represent the perpetuation of hope. The synergy between textual translation and visual language enhances emotional resonance in cross-cultural contexts, achieving optimal communicative efficacy.

In summary, when translating audiovisual works, translators should consider factors such as subtitle time and space limitations, the film's visuals, and the cultural background and cognitive abilities of the audience. By flexibly adjusting translation strategy, they can ensure accurate information transfer while optimizing the viewer's experience.

4. Conclusion

High-quality film and television works, coupled with precise, expressive, and compelling subtitle translation serve as crucial pathways to enhance China's international communication capabilities and cultivate a positive national image. Through analysis of the bilingual subtitles in the micro-documentary *On the Tail of the Chinese Dragon*, this study reveals the selections and adaptations made by translators during language conversion, cultural transmission, and realization of communicative intentions, demonstrating the significant role of vivification translation strategy in conveying filmic essence, disseminating cultural distinctiveness, and facilitating cross-cultural communication. The findings suggest that, based on an adaptation to the ecological differences in translation environments, translators can fully leverage their subjective agency to enhance the appeal and emotional resonance of translated texts via vivification translation strategy, achieving harmonious balance in linguistic, cultural, and communicative dimensions. This strategy not only enables multidimensional presentation of Chinese cultural characteristics but also allows international audiences to perceive affinity and vitality when understanding China, thereby strengthening global goodwill and recognition. Therefore, China should continue deepening practices in narrating Chinese stories, innovating communication methods and content, while presenting an authentic, credible, endearing, and admirable image through more open and inclusive approaches.

This study not only provides some references for the practical application of Eco-translatology but also offers new perspectives and methods for the research on documentary subtitle translation. However, it still has certain limitations. First of all, due to space constraints, this study selects only a few typical cases for analysis and does not conduct a comprehensive discussion of all the subtitles in the documentary. Secondly, this study lacks audience feedback data. Future research could employ empirical methods such as eye-tracking experiments and satisfaction surveys to directly assess the impact of subtitle translation on audience reception, providing further validation of the effectiveness of the vivification translation

strategy. Additionally, broader cultural communication pathways should be explored by expanding the research scope to include a wider range of film genres and subtitle cases, thereby offering diverse perspectives to address subtitling challenges and further enriching research in this field.

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The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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