

# Handling and Transformation of Cultural Elements in the Translation of Red Documentaries—Taking “Peng Guochen, a Veteran of the Sichuan Army” as an Example

Ren Jia, Zhang Lingling, Xiang Shanshan, Gong Baiding, Hu Lu\*

School of Foreign Languages, Chengdu University of Information Technology, Chengdu, 610025, China

\*lucyhu311@163.com

**Keywords:** Cultural elements, documentary translation, translation strategy, China’s red culture

**Abstract:** This paper takes the documentary Peng Guochen, a Veteran of the Sichuan Army as an example and studies the processing and transformation of cultural elements in documentary translation. In the translation process, the translator needs to make appropriate adjustments according to the language and cultural background of the target audience, and also needs to fully consider the audience’s acceptability and cultural background to avoid over-localization or over-westernization. First, this paper analyses the cultural elements in documentaries; then, it discusses the factors that should be considered in translation, and in the specific translation practice, translators need to use various translation strategies to adapt to the needs of the target culture; finally, it summarizes the issues that need to be paid attention to in the translation process and provides some useful experiences and references for documentary translation.

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Background

The documentary "Peng Guochen, a Veteran of the Sichuan Army" shows us a veteran of the Sichuan Army named Peng Guochen, who experienced many hardships during China’s Anti-Japanese War and Liberation, but always kept his faith and came forward in the most critical moments, making an indelible contribution to the liberation of the motherland and the happiness of the people.

This documentary incorporates many elements of Sichuan and can be considered a microcosm of Sichuan Red Culture. During the World War II, Sichuan became an important site of resistance for the Chinese people, where many brave soldiers fought and died in defense of their country [1].

Peng Guochen was a soldier in the Eighth Route Army and the Sichuan Army. Before joining the revolutionary movement, he was an ordinary farmer, but he was full of enthusiasm and faith in the future of his country and nation. During China’s Anti-Japanese War, Peng Guochen and his comrades fought under difficult conditions as they fought to defend their country and for national independence and liberation.

However, after China’s Anti-Japanese War, China entered a new historical period. Different political forces began to compete for power in China, which eventually led to a nationwide civil war [2]. Veteran Peng Guochen in the documentary was also imprisoned, but he did not give up his beliefs and after many trials and tribulations, he joined the Communist Party of China and became a pioneer of the new era. His experience is not only his personal history, but also the history of this era, a journey that the Communist Party of China and the people have taken together.

Through this documentary, we can see that Sichuan Red Culture has been deeply integrated into Chinese history and culture and has become an eternal symbol [4]. Both in history and in reality, the red culture is a symbol of the times, representing the indomitable spirit of struggle of the Chinese people and highlighting their patriotism and dedication.

### 1.2 Definition and Characteristics

Documentary translation is the process of translating the linguistic and textual content of a documentary into a different language or dialect so that a wider range of audience can understand and

appreciate it. Unlike traditional film translation, documentary translation not only needs to accurately convey the information in the film, but also reveal the real events, cultural background and social context behind the film to the audience [5]. Therefore, documentary translation has the following characteristics:

First, translators should focus on faithfulness to the source text. As a form of documentary video art, the content presented in documentaries is often more realistic, so in the translation process, maintaining the originality of the source text is the most basic requirement. The translator must respect the intention of the author and faithfully convey the message [6].

Second, emphasis should be placed on interpretation and dubbing. In documentaries, the combination of image and sound, as well as the interaction between image and language, are very important. In the translation process, if subtitles are used, then the interpreter needs to accurately convert the source text into a natural and fluent target language so as to ensure that the audience can better understand and feel the characters and emotions in the film. The dubbing, on the other hand, translators need to take into account the intonation, pronunciation standard and emotional expression of the voice in order to achieve the best translation effect [3].

Third, focus on the cultural background. Documentaries often involve specific cultural backgrounds and historical events, so in the translation process, translators need to understand the relevant historical and cultural knowledge to better understand and translate the cultural meanings in the source text [9]. For example, the documentary "Peng Guochen, a Veteran of the Sichuan Army" shows the profound influence of red culture on the spiritual world of the Sichuan Army veterans through the war years experienced by Peng Guochen, so in the translation process, the translator needs to have an in-depth understanding of the history and culture of the Sichuan Army [8].

Last, focus on colloquial expressions. Documentary translation requires translators to adopt colloquial expressions which are easy to understand, so that viewers can better understand the message and emotion expressed in the film, reflecting the true and natural characteristics of the documentary [13]. The translation of documentary films should be done in an easy-to-understand way so that the audience can better understand the message and emotion expressed in the film, reflecting the true and natural characteristics of the documentary.

In conclusion, documentary translation is a highly specialized job, which requires translators with profound language skills and cultural awareness to ensure that the information and emotions conveyed in the translation process match the source text, while ensuring the accuracy and fluency of the translation, so that more viewers can appreciate the history, culture and emotions in the documentary [19]. We also ensure the accuracy and fluency of the translation so that more viewers can appreciate the history, culture and emotion behind the documentary.

### **1.3 Importance of Preserving and Promoting**

Translation plays a vital role in the transmission and promotion of red culture. In recent years, the release of the Sichuan red culture documentary "Peng Guochen, a Veteran of the Sichuan Army" in Chinese and English fully demonstrates the importance of translation in preserving and promoting red culture [19].

First, translation enables red culture to be more widely disseminated and promoted across linguistic and geographical boundaries. In the documentary "Peng Guochen, a Veteran of the Sichuan Army", the translator blends Chinese dialect and culture into English so that more foreign viewers can better understand the background and connotation of the Sichuan Red Culture. This will not only enhance international friendship, promote knowledge and deepen understanding of Chinese red culture, but also lay a solid foundation for the promotion of red culture in the international world [7].

Second, translation can help preserve the authenticity and accuracy of red culture. In the English and Chinese versions of "Peng Guochen, a Veteran of the Sichuan Army," the translator not only needs to simply translate Chinese into English, but also needs to accurately convey the cultural connotation of words and scenes. This requires not only profound language skills, but also a thorough understanding and knowledge of red culture [17].

Finally, translation can also provide creativity and inspiration for the innovation and evolution of

red culture. With the development of the times and changes in society, red culture also needs to keep up with the times and be updated. In the process of translation, translators can try to combine elements of red culture with contemporary culture to create a more modern translated version, so that more young people can understand and identify with red culture [4]. The translators can try to combine elements of red culture with contemporary culture to create a more modern version, so that more young people can understand and identify with red culture.

## **2. The Culture Elements**

### **2.1 Identification and Historical Origin**

Cultural elements are signs, symbols, images, language, etc. that have unique meaning and symbolic significance in a certain cultural context, which can reflect the characteristics of a nation, region or era [14]. In translated documentaries, the translator's task is to transform the original cultural elements into cultural elements of another language and to ensure the accuracy, richness, completeness and spiritual consistency of the information. The identification and origin of cultural elements differ depending on the cultural background and different times. In the translation process of documentaries, special attention should be paid to the identification and historical origin of cultural elements in order to ensure the quality and cultural value of the translation [8].

By watching the documentary "Peng Guochen, a Veteran of the Sichuan Army", we can be impressed by the unique charm of Sichuan Red Culture. In the process of translating the documentary, the translator needs to have an in depth understanding and research of these cultural elements to ensure that the translation can accurately convey the cultural message. The most prominent cultural elements are "Sichuan Army" and "Red Culture".

The "Sichuan Army" refers to the army of Sichuan, the historical origins of which can be traced back to the Qing Dynasty. In the late Qing Dynasty, Sichuan's White Army and Green Army often had been in conflict until the revolution of 1911, when the Sichuan Army began to expand. Over time, the Sichuan Army played an important role in China's Anti-Japanese War and Liberation, and as a result, it has become a unique cultural symbol and historical legacy of Sichuan.

The term "Red Culture" refers to the revolutionary culture under the leadership of the Communist Party of China. In China's revolutionary history, red culture has played an extremely important role. The origin of red culture can be traced back to the founding of the Communist Party of China in 1921, when it created a new revolutionary culture and spread it throughout the country. Red culture created a new era, shaped the image of the Chinese revolution, and became an important element in Chinese culture [16].

The identification of cultural elements is an important task in translating documentaries, which can help translators better understand and convey cultural messages and promote cross-cultural communication and understanding [18]. When translating documentaries, translators should try to understand the meaning and historical origin of the original cultural elements as much as possible, so as to translate them into the cultural elements of another language and ensure the accuracy, richness and completeness of the information [8].

### **2.2 Challenges and Difficulties**

The differences between different cultures are the biggest difficulty in translation, especially when it comes to cultural elements. Domestic cultural elements are not familiar to foreigners, such as Sichuan dialects, idioms, allusions, etc. These are all unique symbols in Chinese culture. In the process of translation, the translator must interpret these symbols and find the most suitable way to translate them. However, these cultural elements often have profound historical backgrounds and cultural connotations, which can lead to distortion of the message if they are not translated properly. For example, "Sheng Guan Fa Cai, Qing Zou Bie Lu" is translated as "For fame and fortune, take other ways." and "Tan Sheng Pa Si, Mo Ru Ci Men" is translated as "Afraid of death, get away from here."

The grammar and expressions of the language are also problems for translators, as the grammatical

structures between Chinese and English are very different [5]. The expressions in Chinese are usually in a broad sense, while English is more detail-oriented and logical. For example, "Can Jun Ru Wu" is translated as "joined the army" in English, with the addition of "the" except the verb and noun. Therefore, when translating the Sichuan red culture documentary "Peng Guochen, a Veteran of the Sichuan Army", the translator must grasp the grammatical conversion and the conversion of expressions on the basis of preserving the original meaning.

The vocabulary in Chinese has rich connotation and meaning, while the vocabulary in English is often more direct. For example, "Yu Xue Jiang Chang" in Chinese depicts a more vivid picture of the war, while its English translation "fought bloody battles" is more direct and clear to the point.

### 2.3 Translation Skills

A documentary is a film that describes, records, or studies the real world that requires the integration of historical, cultural and social elements to present a specific theme or event. When translating a documentary, the accuracy and integrity of the cultural elements conveyed becomes crucial [6].

First, the translator needs to understand the theme and intent of the documentary. In this case, the theme is red culture, and the intent is to showcase the heroic deeds of Sichuan veterans while highlighting Sichuan's position in the history of Chinese revolution. The translator must take these factors into account to ensure the accuracy of the message [8].

Second, the translator needs to conduct an in-depth study of the cultural elements involved in the film. In "Peng Guochen, a Veteran of the Sichuan Army," a large number of Sichuan dialects and colloquialisms are incorporated into the film. For example, in the documentary, veteran Peng Guochen's catchphrase "Down with the Japs" cannot be translated directly into English, but needs to be translated, for example, into "Defeat the Japanese fascists", so that foreign audience can better understand the phrase. These elements are an important part of Sichuan culture, as well as key to conveying the significance and context of the film. Therefore, when translating these parts, the translator needs to take into account the cultural characteristics of the target language, while preserving the context of the original version [11].

In addition, the translation of words and concepts is also the focus of translating cultural elements. Many words and concepts with historical and cultural backgrounds are incorporated in "Peng Guochen, a Veteran of the Sichuan Army", such as "the Long March of the Red Army", "throwing oneself into the army", "the Battle of Songshan", and "the Mukden Incident", etc. These terms and concepts may be common to Chinese audiences, but they may be unfamiliar to overseas audiences. And also, the concept of "Red Revolutionary Spirit" expressed by veteran Peng Guochen in the documentary may need to be further elaborated in the English context in order for foreign audience to better understand the concept. When translating these words and concepts, translators need to pay attention to professionalism and accuracy, while also taking into account the acceptability of overseas audiences [8].

Last, the translator also needs to pay attention to the treatment of phonetic and paraphrase. In "Peng Guochen, a Veteran of the Sichuan Army", there are many names of people, places and organizations, such as "Sichuan Army", "Peng Guochen", "the Communist Party of China" and so on. The translation of these terms needs to take into account the preservation of the original phonetic rhyme and meaning, and at the same time make appropriate translations to ensure that readers of the target language can understand them [2].

To sum up, translating the cultural elements of a documentary requires the translator to have an in-depth understanding of the subject and the intent, conduct thorough research on the cultural elements, pay attention to the accuracy of words and concepts, and at the same time handle properly in terms of transliteration and paraphrasing. It is by the use of these strategies that the cultural content of the documentary can be accurately, completely and tactfully conveyed, allowing the audience to truly understand the history, culture and values contained in the film [9].

### **3. The Processing and Transformation**

#### **3.1 Handling Techniques**

Cultural elements refer to various differences between different languages and cultures, such as language, customs, cultural background, etc. In audio and video translation, the skill of handling cultural elements is also important to make the viewers feel the cultural differences and to make them better understand and appreciate the documentary [3].

First of all, the translators use a lot of cultural translation techniques in their translation work. Not only do they incorporate the linguistic characteristics of the Sichuan region, such as emphasizing the use of Sichuan dialects and highlighting the local nature of the culture, but they also carefully consider the linguistic characteristics of English and use some authentic words and phrases to translate it, making the translated text more readable and comprehensible.

Next, the translators used a great deal of cultural background knowledge in the translation process. They have a deep understanding and interpretation of traditional Chinese culture and Sichuan's history and culture and are able to translate them into expressions that are more suitable for foreign audiences and do not lose the meaning of the original text. For example, in the translation, the translators use historical narratives and the introduction of local culture to allow the audience to better understand the hardships of the Long March victory and the patriotic heritage of the Sichuan Army.

Finally, the translator also used some cultural interchange techniques in the translation. For example, Chinese customs and traditional arts are reasonably integrated into English so that foreign audiences can also feel the charm of Chinese culture. At the same time, the translator also makes moderate use of foreign languages in the translation to better reflect the cultural diversity and interchangeability, so that the audience can better accept and appreciate the program while understanding different cultures.

#### **3.2 Cultural Element Conversation**

The handling and translation of cultural elements in translation is an important task that requires not only familiarity with the grammatical structure and vocabulary of both languages, but also an understanding of the differences between cultures and the impact of these differences on the meaning of the text. The correct handling of cultural elements is even more crucial in translating documentaries, as it is about the transmission and promotion of history, culture and values.

In the translation process, the translator needs to transform the cultural elements in relation to the context and the target audience. In this documentary, the translator adopts a balanced strategy to preserve the original connotation of the cultural elements while making them easier to understand. For example, in the film, the translator translates "Jun Hao" of the Sichuan veterans as "bugle", which can more accurately convey the meaning of the bugle and at the same time conform to the military terminology of English-speaking countries [8].

The translator needs to check and adjust the consistency of the result of the cultural element transformation. In this process, the translator needs to grasp the style and rhythm of the whole work to make sure that the cultural elements will not destroy the overall feeling of the work [8]. For example, in this documentary, the translator translates the term "Lao Gu Dong" into "the old antique", although the two words are conceptually different, they do not seem abrupt in the overall sense.

In conclusion, in the conversion of cultural elements in translation, translators need to have profound cultural literacy and keen language perception. In the process of converting cultural elements, translators need to seek a balance between preserving the original connotation of the cultural elements and making them more easily understood and accepted. In this way, the true essence and significance of a piece of work can transcend linguistic and cultural divides, and still be effectively communicated [8].

#### **3.3 Efficiency Analysis**

As the exchanges between China and the rest of the world become more and more frequent, translation plays an increasingly important role in cross-cultural communication. And in translation, the importance of translation skills cannot be overstated.

For the translation of Chinese into English, direct translation often makes the language expression seem stiff and verbose [20]. In "Peng Guochen, a Veteran of the Sichuan Army", the word in Chinese "Jian Ao Sui Yue" in the source text is literally translated as "years of suffering", which is faithful to the original text, but in fact, this kind of translation is not commonly used in spoken English, and it is more likely to cause reading difficulties. In the formal translation, "turbulent times" is a more common expression, which can be more in line with the English expression habits and make English smoother and easier to understand.

The use of translation skills can also make the translation more expressive. In the documentary, veteran Peng Guochen speaks impassioned about his experience in the War to Resist US Aggression and Aid Korea, expressing his strong patriotic feelings for his country. In the English translation, some expressions can be adjusted appropriately to bring out the veteran's emotion more. In the film, the expression in Chinese "Zu Guo Yi Sheng Hu Han, Bian Yi Wu Fan Gu" is translated as "Once the motherland called, there was no hesitation to go to the battlefield." This sentence uses the customary expressions in English and highlights the veteran's firm determination by using an emphatic sentence pattern, making the translation more accurate.

The use of translation skills can also help readers better understand the cultural context of the translated text. In the film, when Peng Guochen talks about the call-up to the army after the outbreak of war, he says, "Because the country was in shortage of people at that time, I became a soldier within a year." Although this sentence seems simple, it covers the macro background of the country at that time. For foreign readers, they may not understand the situation of China at that time, and the translation of "Because the country was in need of soldiers at that time, I enlisted within a year" conveys more clearly to the readers the situation of the country at that time, so that the readers can better understand the reason why the veteran joined the army.

#### **4. Conclusion**

Peng Guochen, a Veteran of the Sichuan Army during the Long March, was a loyal Marxist who sacrificed his life for the revolutionary cause and the interests of the people. In the red documentary "Peng Guochen, a Veteran of the Sichuan Army", we see his firm belief, bravery, fearless fighting spirit and infinite love for the revolutionary cause. However, in the process of translating this documentary, the handling and conversion of cultural elements between the Chinese and English versions also reflect the difficulty and artistry of translation.

As a red documentary, it covers a great variety of historical and cultural elements, including a large number of regional languages, dialects, slang, etc. These need to be converted or transcoded in the translation process, and even reconstructed according to the context [15].

In addition, the differences between different languages and cultural backgrounds need to be taken into account in the translation [20].

In this process, the translator needs to have profound linguistic skills and cultural understanding, and also needs to constantly make adjustments and modifications in order to better express the connotations and extensions of the cultural elements. Only in this way can audiences from different countries and regions feel the cultural message of the documentary and better understand the history and cultural heritage of the Chinese revolution [12]. In conclusion, for the translation of the Sichuan red culture documentary "Peng Guochen, a Veteran of the Sichuan Army", the processing and transformation of cultural elements is a challenge. Translators need to use their language and cultural literacy, as well as their understanding and grasp of different cultural elements, to accomplish this task. Through these means, it is able to truly achieve the purpose of cultural dissemination and make Sichuan Red Culture more accessible to more people [10].

#### **Acknowledgemengt**

1) 2022 Technological Innovation Capacity Enhancement Programme of Chengdu University of Information Technology---Multi-modal Translation Communication of Sichuan Red Culture(KYQN202236). 2) Undergraduate Innovation and Entrepreneurship Training Program of

## References

- [1] Zhou Feng: Large-scale documentary "national battle - Sichuan army resistance factual record" broadcast[J], Contemporary Television, (2013) No.10, p.32.
- [2] Han Yali: Red education lays the foundation of new China. [J], Contemporary Television, (2011) No.10, p.29-30.
- [3] Peng Yanhua: Veterans Never Die, Peace Forever - On the Creation Concept and Interpretation of Audio-visual Elements of the Documentary "Broken Knife"[J], The House of Drama (First Half of the Month), (2012) No.8, p.75-77.
- [4] Wang Mengqi: Research on the cultural communication of red elements in Zhang Yimou's early films[D], Chongqing University of Technology and Industry, (2015).
- [5] Zeng J: On the contemporary discourse transformation in red culture inheritance[J], Guizhou Social Science,2017(11): 29-33.
- [6] Li Huiyao. On the Narrative Strategy and Value Connotation of Chinese Historical Documentaries in the New Century[D]. Jiangxi: Nanchang University, (2014).
- [7] Chen Haiyan: Research on Chinese translation of English movie subtitles from the perspective of communication science [D], Northeast Normal University, (2015).
- [8] Li Jiayu: The Subjectivity of Translators in Chinese Translation of English Film Subtitles from the Theory of Purpose: A Case Study of Titanic Subtitles Translation [D], Gansu: Northwest Normal University, (2008).
- [9] Zhang Kan: Reflections on the way of television discourse in historical documentary [J]. Chinese Journal of Radio and Television, (2005) No.8, p.49-50.
- [10] Du Jianhua, Li Xu: Documentary behind-the-scenes recording: traceability, characteristics and its performance-Examples from The Power of Nature and The Third Pole [J], Television Research,(2018) No.4, p.92-94.
- [11] Yin, Roxie: Strategies of Chinese cultural imagery reproduction in English Chinese subtitle translation [D], Beijing Foreign Studies University, (2019)
- [12] Wang Lijie: Dubbing and Subtitling [D], Hebei University, (2007).
- [13] Su Fei Fei: Exploring film subtitle translation from the perspective of functional translation theory [D], Nanjing Normal University, (2014).
- [14] Huang Shujun: The cultural origin and influence of positive energy films[J], Film Literature, (2017) No.15, p.23-25.
- [15] Choo Qian Wen: A comparison of cultural meanings in the subtitles of different versions of the film Farewell My Concubine in the context of multimodal discourse analysis [D], Zhejiang University, (2021).
- [16] Ma Qingjun: Comparative analysis and translation of Chinese-English "red" culture [J], Joint Journal of Tianjin Vocational Colleges, Vol. 18 (2016) No.7, p.75-78.
- [17] Chang Jing: A study on English Chinese subtitle translation of documentary films from the perspective of cultural turn [D]. Inner Mongolia University, (2021).
- [18] Xin Weidi: Application of Equivalent Translation Theory in Translation of Cultural Elements [D], Shanghai International Studies University, (2010).
- [19] Ma Ling Yang: A Study on Documentary Translation from the Perspective of Conformity Theory[D], Shanghai International Studies University, (2020).
- [20] Li Bo: Naturalization and alienation of subtitle translation in cross-cultural communication perspective [J], English Abroad, (2022) No.13, p.59-61.