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Preserving Cultural Elements in Audiovisual Translation: A Multimodal Contrastive Study of *Mulan*'s Subtitles

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Abstract

This study centers on the critical issue of cultural preservation in the subtitle translation of animated films, using the 1998 Disney feature *Mulan*—a work deeply rooted in Chinese folklore—as a case in point. Adopting Multimodal Discourse Analysis as its theoretical foundation, the research undertakes a comparative investigation of the two Chinese subtitle versions available on two streaming platforms, which are officially named bilibili and iQIYI. Based on distinct user profiles across the two platforms, marked divergences between the two subtitle versions lend rationale to this inquiry. The analytical framework encompasses four dimensions—culture, context, content, and expression—yet deliberately foregrounds the cultural dimension, given the film's rich embeddedness in traditional Chinese values, symbols, and narrative motifs. The findings reveal that the iQIYI subtitles demonstrate a clear superiority in cultural preservation: they not only retain a wealth of indigenous cultural references but also effectively transmit the underlying value system, rendering the translation both accessible and resonant for Chinese audiences. By contrast, the bilibili version, although stronger in contextual adaptation, content coherence, and expressive artistry—particularly in reconciling on screen situational cues with broader socio cultural backgrounds and in restoring nuanced interpersonal relationships—exhibits relative weaknesses in cultural retention. This disparity highlights the inherent tension between cultural fidelity and other translational priorities. Ultimately, the study underscores that for culturally loaded animated features, a deliberate strategy of cultural preservation is indispensable, and it offers practical guidance for future audiovisual translation practices and for comparative analyses that seek to balance multimodal demands with cultural heritage protection.

Keywords

cultural preservation, multimodal discourse analysis, *Mulan*, subtitle translation

1. Introduction

Film subtitles combine visual and auditory modalities and take language as the fundamental carrier to convey emotions, thoughts and cultural connotations. Yves Gambier argued that subtitle translation should take many elements into consideration if viewed holistically, such as the genre, the film-maker's style, the needs and expectations of viewers and the multimodality of audiovisual communication (language, images, sound) [1]. Serving as a textual medium, film subtitles also build a vital bridge for cross-cultural communication and represent a sophisticated art of secondary creation. Therefore, subtitle translation plays a

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pivotal role in the dissemination of films. It is required to not only ensure the accuracy of transmitted information and preserve the style and essence of the original work, but also break down cross-cultural barriers and narrow the psychological distance between audiences with different cultural backgrounds. As Zhang Delu argued that multimodal discourse integrates multiple sensory experiences including audition, vision and tactility, and constructs meaning through the coordinated application of diverse symbolic systems such as language, images, sounds and movements [2]. From the perspective of Multimodal Discourse Analysis, subtitles are regarded as an integral part that functions synergistically with visual, auditory and behavioral symbols, which provides a research approach for the study of film subtitle translation. However, relevant studies in this field remain insufficient. Most existing scholarship focuses on the linguistic characteristics, communication effects and audience acceptance of single film subtitle versions, leaving noticeable research gaps in the comparative study of different subtitle translations for the same film. Besides, the trade-offs made by the two subtitle translation versions across the four dimensions also merit analysis and discussion. Subtitle translation is constrained by multiple factors, as Paola Guardini argued, these mainly include technical constraints, textual constraints and linguistic constraints [3]. Pierre-François Caillé recognized that in subtitle translation, the full rendering of all meanings is unfeasible, which necessitates the exercise of selective decision-making [4].

Both iQIYI and bilibili are prominent licensed video streaming platforms in China, yet they exhibit marked distinctions in platform positioning and user profiles. As a leading integrated video platform, iQIYI serves a broad demographic, with substantial heterogeneity among its users in terms of age, educational attainment and foreign language proficiency. Its subtitles prioritize professionalism and standardisation. As for bilibili, it also maintains substantial popularity for audiovisual content, though its audience is primarily composed of young students and cinephiles, who impose higher expectations on the fluency and artistic expressiveness of subtitle translation. This study adopts the official subtitles from the two platforms as its corpus for comparative translation analysis. The distinct audience positioning and subtitling orientations of the two platforms may give rise to divergences in their translational objectives. The iQIYI subtitles emphasize cultural transmission and audience empathy, while the bilibili subtitles prioritize contextual coherence, narrative aesthetics and natural dialogue flow. Such disparities open up possibilities for divergent subtitling strategies, rendering the two versions amenable to comparative examination across the cultural, contextual, content and expressive dimensions, where cultural preservation stands out as a core area for inquiry.

Adopting the theoretical framework of Multimodal Discourse Analysis, this paper aims to compare the subtitle translation effects of the 1998 animated film *Mulan* on these two high-traffic Chinese video platforms. It conducts an in-depth analysis of subtitle characteristics across four dimensions: culture, context, content and expression. It examines the respective emphases of the two subtitle translations within these four dimensions, and assesses how the cultural preservation performance of the two versions in the culture dimension balances against performance in the other dimensions.

2. Approaches to Multimodal Discourse Analysis

David Machin pointed out that multimodality entered linguistics through the groundbreaking work of Kress and Van Leeuwen in *Reading Images* and *Multimodal Discourse* [5]. Multimodal Discourse Analysis originates from discourse analysis and represents its extension and development. Discourse analysis centers on language itself. As Zhu Yongsheng argued, discourse analysis is generally regarded as the study of language use in communication within context, covering various forms of linguistic practice [6]. As an interdisciplinary theory, discourse analysis is influenced by linguistics, sociology, philosophy and other fields. Theories from diverse disciplines jointly underpin its theoretical foundations and analytical frameworks. Nevertheless, Zhu Yongsheng noted that discourse analysis still lacks a complete theoretical system, clear objectives and systematic research methodologies [6]. In his subsequent research, Zhu Yongsheng further recognized that discourse analysis prioritizes language while neglecting other semiotic forms such as images, sounds and colors, which constitutes one of its major limitations [7]. This insight motivates the research on Multimodal Discourse Analysis.

Besides Zhu Yongsheng, Zhang Delu is another leading Chinese scholar in the field of Multimodal Discourse Analysis. According to Zhang Delu, multimodal discourse is a communicative phenomenon that involves sensory channels including vision, audition and tactility, and employs multiple resources such as

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language, images, sounds and actions [2]. Zhang Delu reviewd domestic and international studies on Multimodal Discourse Analysis, examined its forms and inter-relations, and established a preliminary theoretical framework for multimodal discourse analysis based on Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics. This framework consists of four strata: culture, context, content and expression [2].

2.1 The Cultural Dimension

The cultural dimension is of particular significance in Multimodal Discourse Analysis. According to Zhang Delu, the cultural dimension encompasses ideologies in various forms and the genres that embody such ideologies [2]. This dimension primarily concerns the interactive relationship between discourse and its socio-cultural background. Researchers focus on how different modalities, including language, actions, images and sounds, construct values and meanings across cultures, thereby manifesting underlying ideologies. In other words, the purpose of cultural analysis lies in interpreting how linguistic resources as well as non-linguistic resources such as actions and images construct values. For instance, the same image, the same action or even the same gesture may carry distinct cultural connotations in different cultural contexts.

The interpretation of a film likewise involves multiple elements, including visual and auditory components. The visual elements of a film comprise characters' actions and behaviors, costumes and hairstyles, lighting and color, settings and props, as well as special effects and animation. The auditory elements include characters' language and dialogue, narration and background sound, music and sound effects. These diverse visual and auditory elements implicitly convey value expressions and evoke varied perceptions and responses among audiences from different cultural backgrounds.

2.2 The Contextual Dimension

Zhang Delu recognized that the contextual dimension is divided into field, tenor and mode of discourse [2]. It focuses on how specific situations shape linguistic signs such as dialogues and monologues, as well as non-linguistic signs including images, actions and colors. Context is equally vital for both speakers and audiences. It exerts influences on speakers' verbal content and stylistic tone, as well as audiences' reception, comprehension and meaning interpretation. Within Multimodal Discourse Analysis, context covers a broad range of settings, including situational context, cultural context, social context and historical context.

Films involve an even broader scope of context, consisting of internal context and external context. Internal context refers to the time, location and occasion within the film's narrative. External context includes the time, location and occasion of the film's production, together with audience preferences. Both internal and external contexts shape the cultural connotations of linguistic and non-linguistic signs in the film.

2.3 The Content Dimension

When elaborating on the content dimension within Multimodal Discourse Analysis, Zhang Delu subdivided it into the meaning dimension and the form dimension. Drawing on Systemic Functional Linguistics, he further categorized the meaning dimension into ideational meaning, interpersonal meaning and textual meaning, which are conditioned by the field, tenor and mode of discourse [2]. The following discussion focuses primarily on the meaning dimension of the content dimension.

Film subtitles, together with other film modalities, undertake the task of linguistic expression to deliver accurate, relation-appropriate and coherent information. In terms of ideational meaning, namely information accuracy, film subtitles should integrate the literal meaning of texts with external factors such as characters' mental states and environmental backgrounds. Attention should be paid to how these external factors generate emotional shifts in characters' utterances so as to guarantee the accuracy of conveyed information. For interpersonal meaning, which corresponds to interpersonal relations, subtitles ought to take into account the status, intimacy between interlocutors and communicative occasions, so that correct interpretations of interpersonal relationships and communicative stances can be delivered. As for textual meaning, or textual structure, film subtitles need to consider not only preceding and subsequent narrative segments but also concurrent non-linguistic resources. For instance, it is necessary to examine whether the information conveyed by subtitles aligns with characters' actions, film sound effects, background audio, color special effects and other multimodal elements.

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2.4 The Expression Dimension

The expression dimension in Multimodal Discourse Analysis is divided into the linguistic level and the non-linguistic level. The linguistic level covers vocabulary, syntax, rhetoric and tone, while the non-linguistic level includes images, symbols, colors and other elements. The linguistic and non-linguistic levels frequently interact and function synergistically. Audiences with different linguistic backgrounds and cultural contexts may interpret these linguistic and non-linguistic expressions divergently.

In the translation of film subtitles, both linguistic and non-linguistic expressions carry equal importance. Translators should pay attention to the choice of words, sentences and rhetorical devices in subtitles, as well as the application of dialects, slang and two-part allegorical sayings. Meanwhile, translators ought to consider subtitle length and sentence segmentation, which determine subtitle display duration, the matching between subtitles and visual images, and the coordination between subtitles and music and sound effects. These factors further influence audiences' reception and comprehension of subtitle information.

3. Comparison and Discussion of Two Subtitle Versions of *Mulan*

Set against the backdrop of the Northern Dynasties of China, the 1998 animated film *Mulan* blends Chinese cultural elements, Disney-style aesthetics and Western oriental imagination via its unique camera language, narrative style, lighting and color. It tells the story of Mulan, who disguised herself as a man to take her father's place in the army and triumphantly returned home amid political division and frequent warfare. The film incorporates historically-rooted Chinese elements alongside romanticized adaptations that embody American interpretations of Chinese history and culture. Grounded in Chinese history and culture, the film was produced in English and later released in China. Its Chinese subtitles therefore act as a bridge for Chinese audiences between Western artistic styles, authentic Chinese history and Western oriental imagination, lending it considerable research value. Drawing on Multimodal Discourse Analysis, this paper selects two high-traffic Chinese subtitle versions of *Mulan* from iQIYI and bilibili, and carries out a comparative analysis of the two versions from the cultural, contextual, content and expression dimensions.

3.1 Comparison and Discussion from the Cultural Dimension

The cultural dimension constitutes a vital component of multimodal discourse. Based on the legendary Chinese heroine Mulan and rooted in Chinese history and culture, the animated film *Mulan* demonstrates American interpretations and reconstructions of Chinese figures and Chinese culture. As Zuo Na and Guo Jinlong pointed out, the film adapts the traditional Chinese story of Mulan through American-oriented and modernized revisions [8]. Therefore, the Chinese subtitles of this film are of great significance. They carry elements of Chinese culture as well as American oriental imagination, and serve as a bridge for cross-cultural communication between the two cultures. Guo Shanshan proposed that Disney's adaptation of the traditional Chinese story and protagonist Mulan adheres to a creative philosophy featuring the integration of Disney stylistic characteristics and traditional Chinese aesthetics [9]. However, substantial discontent among Chinese audiences arises from the distorted representation of Chinese culture within the film *Mulan*. Ma Hua pointed out that the embodiment of Chinese cultural elements lacks absolute purity, with extensive integration of Chinese and Western cultural connotations throughout the work [10]. Nevertheless, adaptive modification of cultural elements entails inherent risks. The possible erosion of cultural identity and cultural subjectivity throughout the adaptation process represents a subject deserving scholarly investigation. As Deng Xiaoran argued, the multi-dimensional construction within an open cultural framework does not justify the fragmentation and alienation of cultural subjectivity. The loss of culturally Chinese identity and the breakdown of cultural markers are unacceptable in cross-cultural adaptation [11]. Accordingly, in the multimodal analysis of the film *Mulan* and its subtitle translations, heightened academic attention should be allocated to cultural preservation within the cultural dimension. Emphasis ought to be placed on the perspective of cultural preservation in the comparative examination of alternative subtitle versions. Noticeable discrepancies between the iQIYI and bilibili subtitles in this respect merit further analysis in subsequent sections.

Example 1: Quiet and demure. Graceful. Polite. Delicate.

iQIYI: 妇德指品德。妇言，注意辞令。妇容，要端庄。

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bilibili: 文静，娴淑。优雅，礼貌。雅致。文雅坦然。

These lines are repeated by Mulan before she meets the matchmaker, illustrating ancient Chinese marital norms and etiquettes that young women were supposed to learn prior to marriage. Set in the Northern Dynasties, the era was shaped by Confucian ideologies inherited from the Han Dynasty, under which women were expected to observe the Four Virtues. The iQIYI rendition adopts three core concepts from the ancient Chinese Four Virtues, namely women's virtue, women's speech and women's appearance, with the fourth being women's work. This version forms a logical echo between Mulan's recitation of etiquette rules and her subsequent meeting with the matchmaker. It restricts ancient Chinese behavioral and moral requirements for women and reflects the Confucian ethical culture of that era, enabling Chinese audiences to associate with relevant cultural backgrounds. By contrast, the bilibili version maintains close fidelity to the original English subtitle text. According to Lin Danya and Zhang Chun, Disney situates the film within a feminist framework, reconstructing Mulan away from traditional loyalties and filial ethics into a modern-style figure in pursuit of individual emancipation and self-realisation [12]. Hence, lexical items in the original English lines correspond to desirable qualities of modern women. While the bilibili subtitle retains these descriptors of female merits embedded in the English source text, it generates diminished representation of Confucian ethical culture and reduces the extent of cultural evocation for Chinese audiences. From the perspective of cultural preservation, the subtitle translation of the iQIYI version achieves superior retention of traditional Chinese cultural and historical nuances, whereas the bilibili translation results in cultural loss.

Example 2: She gets it from your side of the family.

iQIYI: 她可是你那一族的后代。

bilibili: 她可是你们家那边的人。

This subtitle appears after Mulan secretly leaves home disguised as a man to take her father's place in the army. Mulan's grandmother prays to the ancestors for Mulan's protection, and the spirits of ancestors gather to argue over who shall guard Mulan. For the phrase "your side of the family", the two versions render it as "你那一族" and "你们家那边" respectively. In ancient Chinese clan culture, distinctions are drawn between the major lineage and minor lineage. "Same clan" means people share a common ancestral origin yet may have distant blood ties, whereas "same lineage branch" refers to a specific subgroup with much closer kinship. The iQIYI translation "你那一族" logically accounts for the ancestors' evasive behaviour based on varying degrees of blood-related closeness and embodies ancient Chinese patriarchal clan culture. In contrast, the bilibili rendering "你们家那边" may confuse Chinese audiences. Since these spirits are all ancestors of the Hua family, the expression "你们家那边" sounds inappropriate. It weakens the logical coherence of the plot and erases the Chinese patriarchal clan culture implied in the film. In particular, the visual presentation of the film features chaotic verbal disputes among ancestral characters, in stark contrast to the solemn and orderly conventions of traditional clan assemblies. As Ma Hua observed, the unstructured seating and interactive order of the Hua clan's ancestral hall assembly bears a striking resemblance to the operational mechanism of Western board meetings [10]. The fundamental rituals and forms of Chinese clan culture are largely absent in this scene. Even though the clan culture is retained in the film *Mulan*, it undergoes American-oriented adaptation. As observed by Wen Tingting and Zhang Enpu, many Chinese cultural elements incorporated into the film cease to qualify as authentic Chinese elements upon external output, having been transformed into vehicles for the promotion of American values. In the scene where Mulan's grandmother appeals to ancestors for blessings for Mulan, the ancestors are no longer presented as dignified and solemn figures. Instead, they engage in mutual evasion, reproach and farcical quarrels [13]. By comparison, the subtitle version from iQIYI enables partial vestiges of clan culture to be maintained. In contrast, the retention of clan culture in the bilibili subtitle version is minimal, Chinese audiences are therefore more exposed to American family culture rather than indigenous Chinese clan culture. From the perspective of cultural preservation, the iQIYI version therefore possesses comparative advantages, enabling partial compensation for cultural omissions within the visual sequence.

Beyond Disney's American-centered handling of the *Mulan* narrative, such adaptation is subject to the influences of additional cultural factors. As noted by Ding Fangfang, Western nations are prone to stereotypes or romantic misconception toward Eastern cultures [14]. In the subtitle translation of the film *Mulan*, adequate attention should be paid to culturally modified elements within subtitles. These elements are either infused with Western undertones, subject to misinterpretation, or trapped in romantic misconception. Neglecting such

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cultural information and pursuing absolute fidelity to the original English subtitles may give rise to confusion among Chinese audiences.

As illustrated in the cases above, the two subtitle versions of the animated film *Mulan* adopt different emphases on the cultural dimension. The iQIYI version tends to restore relevant Chinese cultural connotations for better reception and comprehension among Chinese audiences. The bilibili version stays largely faithful to the English source text, yet it weakens the transmission of Chinese culture. Meanwhile, it reflects the insufficient understanding of Chinese culture embedded within this American production and its English subtitles, highlighting American interpretations of Chinese culture.

3.2 Comparison and Discussion from the Contextual Dimension

Consideration of the contextual dimension is indispensable in subtitle translation. Anne Ketola pointed that the object of translation refers to unique interpretations, namely mental representations. Such representations are triggered in translators upon their reading of source-text segments and generated through the process of reading comprehension [15]. Separated from the context constructed by the film's narrative structure, audiences can hardly grasp the implications of characters' lines or interpret their emotions, and the cultural implications embedded within the narrative background will also be lost. Likewise, disregard for the film's external context may result in outputs inconsistent with audiences' psychological expectations and reduce audience acceptance. For the subtitle translation of the 1998 animated film *Mulan*, translators need to take the film's internal context into account. Meanwhile, they should bear in mind that the target audiences of Chinese subtitles are modern Chinese viewers, whose emotional expectations ought to be satisfied.

Example 3: Who is that girl I see?

iQIYI: 那是谁家姑娘？

bilibili: 倒影里的姑娘是谁？

This line occurs right after Mulan ruins her meeting with the matchmaker and gets reproached. Back home, she stares sadly at her own reflection in the lake and sings this line softly. The iQIYI translation remains faithful to the original English sentence yet has weak relevance to the on-screen visuals. It fails to convey Mulan's frustration over being unable to stay true to herself. By contrast, the bilibili version adds the modifier "倒影里的". The subtitle matches the scene where Mulan gazes sorrowfully at her lake reflection, building stronger connections among visuals, lines and translation. Furthermore, this added modifier creates a contrast between Mulan standing on the bank and her mirrored image in the lake, both visually and verbally. It better renders Mulan's frustration and confusion caused by her inability to be herself.

Example 4: I will die doing what's right.

iQIYI: 我心甘情愿为正义献身。

bilibili: 我为国捐躯，死而无憾。

This line is spoken by Mulan's father after receiving the conscription order, when Mulan tries to dissuade him. Within the narrative context of *Mulan*, the core theme centers on devotion to family and country, highlighting the spirit of upholding righteousness and dedicating oneself to the nation. The iQIYI rendering "为正义献身" focuses on moral right and wrong. In contrast, the bilibili version "为国捐躯" emphasizes patriotism, which is more consistent with the film's internal context and the expression of the Chinese national spirit. Furthermore, this animated film was released in 1998, and its Chinese subtitles target modern Chinese audiences living in an era marked by national ethnic unity. From modern viewers' perspective, the ethnic conflicts of the Northern Dynasties are not a matter of moral right versus wrong. Therefore, the phrase "为国捐躯" in the bilibili version better meets audiences' emotional expectations than the iQIYI rendering "为正义献身".

As shown in the examples above, the bilibili subtitle version forms tighter connections with the film's visuals, sounds and emotional expressions. It offers a more nuanced grasp of Chinese audiences' psychology. Therefore, it performs slightly better than the iQIYI version in handling both the film's internal and external contexts.

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3.3 Comparison and Discussion from the Content Dimension

In the following comparative analysis of subtitle translation of *Mulan* based on Multimodal Discourse Analysis, the discussion focuses on the meaning dimension of the content dimension, namely ideational meaning, interpersonal meaning and textual meaning. It elaborates on the similarities and differences between the iQIYI and bilibili subtitle versions in conveying background and event information, shaping characters' personalities and social-interpersonal relations, and constructing textual logic.

Example 5: We all must serve our emperor, who guards us from the Huns.

iQIYI: 百姓们要为皇帝尽忠，把匈奴抵抗。

bilibili: 百姓们要为皇帝尽忠，他为我们抵抗匈奴

This line is sung by Mulan and the villagers. Nevertheless, the two subtitle versions produce divergent results in information transmission. The attributive clause "who guards us from the Huns" indicates that it is the emperor who resists the Huns. The bilibili version faithfully reproduces this original message. By contrast, The iQIYI version may be adjusted to echo the subsequent lyrics concerning the respective duties of men and women in homeland defence, or to correspond to the historical and cultural connotations of civilians joining the battlefield to defend their nation. This rendition modifies the subject of resistance against the Huns, which reduces the accuracy of conveyed information yet enables greater cultural preservation of Chinese historical information. It can be argued that in the trade-off between textual accuracy and cultural retention, this version prioritises historical culture.

Example 6: I am ready to serve the Emperor.

iQIYI: 我决心为国尽忠。

bilibili: 草民愿意为皇上效命。

This line is spoken by Mulan's father as he receives the imperial edict, when imperial officials notify every household to supply able-bodied men for military service. Right after he accepts the edict, Mulan rushes out and pleads with the official to exempt her father from conscription. The official reproaches Mulan sternly from a superior stance, which reflects the sharp hierarchical gap between the Hua family and the imperial envoy. For the rendering of the pronoun "I", the two versions adopt "我" and "草民" respectively. From the perspective of interpersonal meaning, the bilibili translation better mirrors the status disparity between the two interlocutors. Nevertheless, it should be noted that Mulan's father stands rather than kneels while receiving the edict in the visual scene. Judging from the contextual dimension concerning the coordination between subtitles and visuals, the iQIYI rendering is also acceptable. It reveals the American filmmakers' insufficient knowledge of ancient Chinese rituals and their heavy reliance on oriental imagination.

Example 7: Mulan, you dishonor me.

iQIYI: 木兰，别让我丢脸。

bilibili: 木兰，别让我丢脸。

This line is spoken softly by Mulan's father, who turns his head away from Mulan after she pleads with the imperial official and gets reprimanded. Both subtitle versions convert the original declarative sentence into an imperative one, shifting the implied meaning from "You have brought disgrace upon me" to "Do not bring disgrace upon me". From the perspective of plot development and character-building, Mulan's father offers gentle comfort when she feels dejected. Even when Mulan argues angrily with him over dinner, he only firmly states his resolution to sacrifice for his country rather than reproaching her. It follows that Mulan's father in the film is prepared to dedicate himself to the nation, yet treats her with tenderness and forbearance. Such translation handling achieves greater rationality in terms of textual meaning.

The examples above reveal differences between the two subtitle versions in their treatment of ideational meaning, interpersonal meaning and textual meaning under the content dimension. The bilibili version delivers more nuanced rendering in information transmission and the representation of hierarchical status gaps, and achieves higher fidelity to the original utterances of the film. Comparatively, the iQIYI version presents certain deficiencies in informational accuracy.

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3.4 Comparison and Discussion from the Expression Dimension

Subtitle translation endows works with soul. It determines whether contextual reproduction can be achieved so as to offer audiences stronger cultural immersion and an immersive experience of cinematic art. In the animated film *Mulan*, slang expressions are among the most representative parts, and the two subtitle versions differ significantly in their handling of the slang expressions.

Example 8: And even you can't blow it.

iQIYI: 即使它不能带来这些。

bilibili: 保证连你也不会出岔子。

This line occurs when Mulan's grandmother gives her a cricket mascot, hoping that the mascot will bring good fortune to Mulan. The original utterance adopts the slang expression "blow it", which means to spoil something or miss an opportunity. The iQIYI version suffers from inaccuracy of information, as it fails to grasp the original meaning and omits the slang feature of the source sentence. In comparison, the bilibili version renders it as "出岔子", which is close to the original meaning and adopts corresponding Chinese colloquialism, thus achieving better communicative effect.

The iQIYI and bilibili subtitle versions adopt vastly different translation styles. Regarding slang expressions, the iQIYI version shows deficiencies in both information accuracy and artistic quality, whereas the bilibili translation delivers a comparatively better performance.

4. Conclusion

This study, grounded in Multimodal Discourse Analysis and oriented towards the overarching objective of cultural preservation, conducts a comparative examination of the two Chinese subtitle versions of the 1998 animated film *Mulan* provided by iQIYI and bilibili. The findings reveal that the two translations display distinct strengths across different dimensions. The iQIYI version demonstrates a clear advantage on the cultural dimension: it deliberately prioritizes cultural transmission by faithfully retaining a rich array of traditional Chinese cultural references and core value constructs, thereby rendering the subtitles highly intelligible and culturally resonant for domestic audiences. In contrast, the bilibili version excels in the contextual, content, and expressive dimensions—it more adeptly reconciles intra-filmic situational cues with broader socio-cultural backgrounds, restores the nuanced interpersonal relationships among characters, and preserves the overall artistic style of the original production. However, this comparative superiority in other areas comes at the expense of comparatively weaker cultural retention. Such a disparity underscores a fundamental tension inherent in multimodal subtitle translation: the demands of contextual coherence, narrative fluency, and aesthetic artistry may at times conflict with the imperative of safeguarding cultural heritage.

Given the deeply embedded Chinese folklore origins of *Mulan*, we contend that cultural preservation should not be regarded as merely one of several equal-weighted considerations, but rather as a foundational guiding principle that informs and constrains translational choices across all other dimensions. While streaming platforms targeting diverse audience profiles may legitimately adopt differentiated strategies, the trade-offs involved necessitate careful reflection. For culturally loaded animated features, an optimal translation strategy would give primacy to cultural retention while concurrently striving to harmonize contextual, content-related, and expressive concerns through creative yet respectful translational techniques. Ultimately, striking an appropriate balance among these four dimensions remains a persistent challenge; nonetheless, the protection of cultural identity must remain the paramount concern.

This study offers practical references for future audiovisual translation practices and comparative analyses, emphasizing that in cross-cultural media dissemination, subtitle translators bear a scholarly and ethical responsibility to preserve the cultural essence of the source text. However, this study is subject to certain limitations, as it only carries out a comparative analysis of selected subtitle versions of *Mulan* from iQIYI and bilibili, with findings indicating the iQIYI version's superiority in cultural preservation and the bilibili version's advantages across the other three dimensions. This pattern may stem from divergent audience positioning and subtitling orientations of the two platforms. However, investigation into the nexus among platform audience positioning, subtitling orientations and translation strategy selection calls for empirical

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support from comprehensive comparisons of subtitle translations within an expanded corpus of audiovisual works on both platforms. In the future, the scope of inquiry can be extended to subtitle translations covering a wider range of video genres on these platforms, to unpack the correlation between orientations of subtitle translation strategies and platform user profiles.

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Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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