

Evaluation and Strategy Research on Multimodal Subtitle Translation of the Film "Chang'an 30000 Miles" from the Perspective of Cross Cultural Communication

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Abstract. This paper examines how multimodal subtitle translation works in *Chang'an 30000 Miles*, with particular attention to poems, cultural symbols, and audience reception. Rather than treating subtitles as isolated lines of text, the discussion reads them together with images, music, color, and narrative rhythm. The analysis draws on interviews with five student viewers from different academic backgrounds. Their comments show a clear tension: they expect subtitles to preserve the cultural flavor of Tang poetry and historical references, but they also want the translation to be brief, fluent, and easy to follow while watching the film. On this basis, the paper argues that a single strategy is not enough. Literal translation is useful when poetic imagery or historical terms need to remain visible, while free translation, annotation, or cultural compensation may be more effective when the audience lacks background knowledge. The study therefore recommends a flexible combination of literal and free translation, guided by scene context and audience familiarity. Its limitation lies in the small interview sample, but the findings still offer practical clues for translating Chinese animated films in cross-cultural settings.

Keywords: *Chang'an 30000 Miles*, multimodal subtitle translation, cross-cultural communication, audience reception, translation strategy

1. Introduction

Chang'an 30000 Miles is not only an animated film about poets and journeys; it is also a dense cultural text. Its subtitles carry names, poems, official systems, place images, and emotional turns that are strongly connected with Tang culture. For viewers outside the Chinese-language context, these subtitles may become the first route into the film. If the translation is too literal, the line may sound stiff or obscure. If it is too free, the poetic and historical texture may disappear. This tension makes the film a useful case for discussing subtitle translation from the perspective of cross-cultural communication [1].

Multimodal discourse theory is helpful here because film meaning is not produced by language alone. Images, sound, rhythm, color, and gesture all participate in communication [2]. Cross-cultural communication also reminds translators that audience understanding is shaped by cultural memory, language habits, and expectations about how stories should be told [3]. Previous studies have discussed *Chang'an 30000 Miles* through cultural, contextual, and expressive dimensions [4], and have also examined cultural compensation in the subtitle translation of Chinese animated films [5].

These studies make one point clear: in a film full of poems and historical allusions, subtitles need to work with the screen, not against it.

Still, several questions remain underexplored. Existing discussions often explain translation principles from the translator's side, while the viewer's actual reading experience receives less attention. Research on audience reception also tends to rely on broad categories such as accuracy or fluency, without asking what these words mean when a viewer is watching a fast-moving scene. In *Chang'an 30000 Miles*, the problem is especially concrete. A line from an ancient poem, a reference to the imperial examination, or a place name such as Yumen Pass may be visually powerful but linguistically difficult. These moments require closer analysis than a general discussion of subtitle strategy can provide.

For that reason, this paper uses interview material from five student viewers to examine how audiences respond to different subtitle choices in *Chang'an 30000 Miles*. The analysis focuses on three questions: how multimodal translation supports cultural understanding, how viewers evaluate accuracy and fluency, and how translation strategies should change according to the cultural knowledge of the target audience. The following sections first review related scholarship, then discuss the interview findings, and finally summarize the implications and limitations of the study.

2. Literature review

Research on film subtitle translation has gradually moved from language transfer to multimodal communication. Hu's study of *Chang'an 30000 Miles*, for example, discusses subtitle translation through multimodal discourse analysis and shows that cultural meaning is built through more than verbal content [4]. Yin and Gu's work on *Ne Zha: The Birth of the Demon Child* reaches a similar conclusion in another animated-film context [6]. Wu's research on the English translation of Sun Tzu's *The Art of War* provides a broader cross-cultural perspective, showing that translation decisions are closely related to the transmission of cultural concepts [3]. Wang and Li, meanwhile, draw attention to subtitle technology and its practical problems [7]. Taken together, these studies provide the theoretical background for this paper, but they also show why a case-based discussion is necessary.

In multimodal subtitle translation, the subtitle does not simply repeat the dialogue. It selects, condenses, and sometimes compensates for information that appears through image and sound. Hu argues that multimodal analysis can help translators notice contextual information that a purely linguistic reading may miss [4]. In film viewing, this point is practical rather than abstract. A subtitle may be short, but the audience reads it while seeing costumes, streets, colors, and character movement. The translation therefore has to fit the whole scene. If it explains too much, it interrupts viewing; if it explains too little, the cultural reference may become invisible.

Cross-cultural communication theory adds another layer to this problem. Wu emphasizes cultural difference, cultural identity, and language function in translation [3]. For subtitles, this means that the translator must consider not only what a line says, but also what kind of background knowledge the target audience is likely to bring to the cinema [8]. A familiar Chinese expression may need no explanation for domestic viewers, yet the same expression can become a barrier for viewers who do not know Tang poetry, the imperial examination, or the symbolic value of certain landscapes.

Audience acceptance is therefore an important criterion for judging subtitle quality. Studies based on questionnaires and interviews suggest that viewers usually expect subtitles to be accurate, fluent, understandable, and culturally appropriate [9, 10]. These words, however, should not be treated as fixed labels. In actual viewing, accuracy may mean keeping a poem's image, while fluency may mean reducing a historical explanation to a line that can be read quickly. The present paper uses interview responses to make these judgments more concrete.

The existing literature leaves three gaps that are relevant to this study. The first concerns cultural specificity: many studies discuss general subtitle strategies, but fewer focus on how one culturally

dense film requires different choices in different scenes. The second concerns evidence: audience reception is often mentioned as an ideal, yet the viewer's own language is not always analyzed closely. The third concerns evaluation: translation strategies are frequently described as useful, but their usefulness depends on the audience's knowledge, the visual scene, and the time pressure of subtitle reading.

These gaps do not mean previous research is insufficient; rather, they point to a smaller and more focused task. *Chang'an 30000 Miles* offers scenes where poetry, geography, costume, music, and historical institutions appear together. Such scenes allow this paper to examine how viewers balance cultural preservation with readability.

On this basis, the paper connects multimodal theory with interview evidence. It asks how subtitles can keep the cultural signal of the original film while remaining accessible to viewers who may not share the same literary and historical background. The aim is to form practical translation suggestions grounded in the film's content and in audience response, not only in general translation principles.

3. Interview analysis

3.1. The core role of multimodal subtitle translation in the cross-cultural dissemination of *Chang'an 30000 Miles*

3.1.1. Multidimensional integration and the deepening of viewing experience

The five interviewees all noticed that subtitle translation in *Chang'an 30000 Miles* cannot be separated from the film's visual and auditory design. Their comments suggest that subtitles work best when they do not carry the whole burden of explanation alone. The image of a Tang street, the sound of music, or the color of a palace scene can prepare the audience for meaning before the written line appears. In this sense, multimodal translation is less a decorative technique than a way of sharing interpretive work among text, image, and sound.

Image and text complement each other most clearly in scenes that present Tang architecture, clothing, utensils, and public life. A subtitle may name or briefly explain a cultural object, while the image shows its shape, texture, and social setting. For viewers who do not know Tang culture, this combination is more effective than a long verbal explanation. It lets the audience see the cultural world first and read the subtitle as guidance rather than as a glossary.

Sound also changes how subtitles are received. Background music and environmental sound effects often carry emotion before the audience has fully processed the written words [11]. When a poem or farewell line appears with restrained music, the subtitle does not need to explain every feeling directly. It should leave space for the sound to do part of the work. This is especially important in poetic scenes, where too much explanation can weaken the emotional rhythm.

Color provides another layer of meaning. Court scenes, market scenes, and scenes of travel use different visual atmospheres, and subtitles should respond to those differences. A line connected with the grandeur of the Tang court may need a more formal register, while a line from ordinary life can be translated more plainly. The interview responses indicate that viewers do not judge subtitles by words alone; they judge whether the words feel natural within the whole audiovisual moment.

3.1.2. A bridge for precise cultural communication and cross-cultural dissemination

The interviews show that accuracy and cultural adaptability are not separate demands. Viewers want the translation to remain faithful to the original, but they also expect it to be readable in the target language. Nida's idea of natural reproduction of source-language information helps explain this balance [12]. In the case of *Chang'an 30000 Miles*, accuracy does not always mean word-for-word

translation. It often means protecting the cultural force of a line while choosing an expression that a non-Chinese audience can understand during viewing.

Ancient poems and idioms make this problem visible. Venuti's view that translation transmits culture as well as language is particularly relevant here [13]. When a poem such as 'Looking up at the bright moon, looking down at hometown' appears, the translator has to preserve the moon and homesickness without producing a line that sounds mechanically literal. Lucy's suggestion that the line from 'Bring in the Wine' could use more exaggerated or poetic language also points to the same issue: some poetic energy may be lost if the translation is merely correct. Munday's emphasis on the target reader's understanding and feeling therefore supports a mixed strategy in which literal images are retained but adjusted for readability [14].

Cultural symbols create a different type of difficulty. Clothing, architecture, etiquette, and institutions such as the imperial examination are not just background details; they shape how viewers understand character status and historical setting. Bassnett's discussion of translation and culture suggests that such elements need interpretation, not only conversion [15]. The interviews support this view. Maria, for instance, noted that a background introduction to the imperial examination could help audiences understand its importance. The key is to keep the explanation brief enough for subtitle reading while giving the audience a usable cultural clue.

3.1.3. The importance of decoding and annotating cultural symbols

Cultural-symbol translation is one of the places where multimodal cooperation becomes most necessary. Terms such as Yumen Pass and Silk Road, as well as the Tang court dance 'Rainbow-Like Robe and Feathered Garment Dance', may be meaningful to Chinese viewers but unfamiliar to many international audiences. If these items are translated only as proper names, their cultural weight may be lost. If they are overexplained in subtitles, the viewing rhythm may be damaged. A workable solution is brief annotation supported by the surrounding image and sound.

1. For costume-related scenes, the subtitle can give a compact cultural label while the image supplies detail. When items such as Tang round-collar robes or Ruqun appear, a short note can indicate that the costume belongs to Tang daily or court life, while the visual frame shows color, form, and social use. This approach avoids turning the subtitle into a long explanation. It also respects the audience's ability to learn through the screen.

2. The same logic applies to music and dance. When 'Rainbow-Like Robe and Feathered Garment Dance' appears, the subtitle may keep the poetic title and add a concise hint that it is a Tang court dance. The music and movement then complete the meaning. In such cases, translation is not a single sentence solving a single problem; it is a coordinated choice among name retention, minimal annotation, sound, and image.

3.2. Audience acceptance of different translation strategies and their influencing factors

3.2.1. Accuracy and cultural preservation

Table 2 shows that accuracy is the most frequently emphasized criterion, but the interviewees used the word in a richer sense than simple lexical correctness. Maria connected accuracy with cultural adaptability and emotional communication. Lucy mentioned lexical meaning, completeness, and the need for more poetic force in some lines. Anwro was especially sensitive to the loss of poetic meaning, as in her comment that a literal treatment of 'green mountains and blue waters' may sound flat. These responses suggest that audiences expect subtitles to carry both information and cultural atmosphere [9].

Cultural preservation is therefore not a request to keep every original form unchanged. It is a request to avoid flattening culturally marked expressions into neutral English. For ancient poems,

idioms, costumes, and historical institutions, the translator needs to decide which part of the expression must remain visible. Sometimes the image itself can preserve cultural detail; sometimes the subtitle must keep a key term; sometimes a short explanatory phrase is needed. The common aim is to prevent Tang culture from being reduced to a generic historical setting.

Cross-cultural awareness is also practical. Translators need to estimate what the target audience is likely to know, what can be inferred from the scene, and what must be supplied by the subtitle. The interviews indicate that viewers accept compromise when it is purposeful. They may tolerate a less literal translation if it improves comprehension, but they are less accepting when the translation loses an image, emotion, or cultural clue that the film clearly wants to foreground.

Table 1. Basic information of interviewee

Serial number	interviewee	Gender	Age	major	Grade	Have you watched a movie
1	Maria	female	nineteen	Translation major	Sophomore	yes
2	Porry	male	nineteen	Mechanical Engineering major	Sophomore	yes
3	Lucy	female	twenty	English Major	Junior	yes
4	Larry	male	twenty-four	Speciality of Law	Third year graduate student	yes
5	Anwro	female	twenty-two	Translation major	First year graduate student	yes

Table 2. Viewpoints of interviewees

Serial number	interviewee	Main viewpoint	Category of viewpoints	Specific examples
1	Maria	Multimodal translation should focus on accuracy and cultural adaptability, utilizing elements such as images and sounds to assist in translation	accuracy	1、The translation of 'The bright moon in front of the bed, suspected to be frost on the ground' not only preserves the artistic conception of the original poem, but also allows non Chinese audiences to feel homesickness. 2、The translation of "imperial examination" combined with background introduction helps the audience understand its importance.
2	Porry	Simplicity and appropriateness are very important, and translation should be straightforward. If the translation is too cumbersome or unable to convey information in a short period of time, it will affect satisfaction.	Fluency	The word 'ahead' in 'Don't worry about the road ahead without a confidant' is only translated as 'ahead ', which is considered to be somewhat lacking in translation.

Table 2. (continued)

3	Lucy	Accuracy, completeness, fluency, and cultural connotation communication can all affect translation satisfaction. The translation should accurately convey the lexical meaning of the original text, avoiding incorrect translation or vague expression.	accuracy	1、The translation of 'Do you not see the water of the Yellow River rising from the sky' can be tried with more exaggerated or poetic language 2、The translation of 'Quiet Night Thoughts' preserves the artistic conception of the original poem.
4	Larry	The satisfaction of subtitle translation is influenced by various factors such as accuracy, completeness, and fluency, emphasizing the grammatical structure, logical coherence, and cultural connotation of the translated text	Fluency	The translation should use a natural and fluent target language expression that conforms to the expression habits of the target language.
5	Anwro	Translation should pay more attention to cultural sensitivity and contextual adaptability, preserving the cultural connotations and artistic conception of the original text	accuracy	Pointing out that the literal translation of 'green mountains and blue waters' lacks poetic meaning

3.2.2. Fluency and comprehensibility

Fluency appeared in all five interviews, which shows that viewers do not separate cultural richness from ease of reading. A subtitle can be culturally accurate and still fail if it is too long, awkward, or difficult to process before the scene moves on. For this film, fluency is not a minor stylistic issue. It decides whether cultural information can actually reach the audience during viewing.

The pattern becomes clearer when the responses are read together rather than as separate comments. The interviewees did not ask for simplified translation in every case. Instead, they wanted subtitles to be readable enough to follow the story while still preserving important cultural references. This explains why conciseness, grammatical naturalness, and cultural sensitivity repeatedly appear in their evaluations.

Maria's response is representative because she placed accuracy, fluency, cultural adaptability, and emotional communication in the same group of criteria. Her view suggests that a good subtitle should not force the audience to choose between understanding the plot and feeling the cultural atmosphere. For example, the translation of a poem can keep the image of the moon and homesickness, but its English syntax still needs to move naturally.

Porry's comment is more focused on viewing speed. He preferred subtitles that are concise and direct, and he warned that cumbersome wording can reduce satisfaction. His criticism of translating the idea of the road ahead too simply as 'ahead' is useful because it shows both sides of the problem. A subtitle may be short, but if it removes the emotional or spatial force of the original, brevity alone is not enough.

Lucy treated accuracy and fluency as basic requirements, but she also noticed the need for cultural adaptation. Her comment on the line about the Yellow River suggests that poetic intensity matters. A fluent subtitle should not sound plain when the original line is deliberately grand. In this case, fluency means an English line that reads naturally while still carrying an elevated tone.

Larry emphasized natural target-language expression, grammatical structure, and logical coherence. His view is important because subtitle translation must fit the target language's habits. A

translation that follows Chinese sentence order too closely may preserve surface meaning but make the viewer work too hard. For fast subtitle reading, logical order and idiomatic phrasing become part of accuracy.

Anwro's response adds the issue of cultural sensitivity. She linked fluency with contextual adaptability and warned against losing poetic meaning. Her example of 'green mountains and blue waters' shows that literal translation can produce an expression that is understandable but aesthetically weak. For a film built around poetry and memory, that weakness matters.

Taken together, the five responses show that fluency and comprehensibility are not opposed to cultural preservation. They are the conditions that allow cultural preservation to be noticed. A viewer cannot appreciate a poetic image if the subtitle is too slow to read or too unnatural to process.

In practice, fluency requires natural sentence order, controlled subtitle length, and avoidance of rigid literal translation. The translator should keep key cultural images when they matter, but the English line should still sound like a line that can be read in a film, not a footnote compressed onto the screen.

Comprehensibility can be improved through free translation, cultural substitution, or brief annotation when the original reference is likely to be unfamiliar [16]. The choice depends on the scene. A visually obvious object may need only a short label; a culturally loaded institution such as the imperial examination may need a small contextual clue; a poem may need a balance between image retention and emotional readability.

3.2.3. Flexibility in strategy selection and audience differentiation

The interviews also show that the audience does not expect one fixed translation strategy to solve every problem. The preferred strategy changes with the cultural density of the line, the speed of the scene, and the presumed knowledge of the target viewer. This is why a flexible strategy is more convincing than a simple preference for literal or free translation.

When the target audience is familiar with Chinese culture, literal translation or partial retention of original terms can preserve cultural specificity and allow viewers to enjoy the original texture. When the audience lacks that background, a more interpretive strategy may be needed to prevent misunderstanding [9]. The translation of Yumen Pass, for instance, may keep the place name but add a brief clue about its frontier meaning if the scene depends on that association.

Audience diversity therefore requires adaptive decision-making. Translators need to consider language habits, reading speed, cultural knowledge, and scene function [17]. The interview data suggest a practical rule: preserve the original image when it is central to the film's cultural identity, but help the viewer when the image cannot be understood from the screen alone. This rule keeps cultural difference visible without making subtitles difficult to read.

4. Conclusion

The analysis of *Chang'an 30000 Miles* shows that multimodal subtitle translation plays a concrete role in cross-cultural communication. It helps viewers approach Tang poetry, historical institutions, costumes, music, and geographical symbols through the combined work of text, image, and sound. The interview responses indicate that audiences value literal translation when it protects cultural images, but they also expect fluent and concise English that can be read within the rhythm of the film. The most practical strategy is therefore not a fixed method, but a combination of literal translation, free translation, concise annotation, and cultural compensation according to scene context.

The study also has clear limitations. The interview sample includes only five students, and most of them have some connection with language or humanities learning. Their responses cannot represent all international audiences. The analysis is also limited to selected examples from one film,

so it cannot cover every type of subtitle problem in Chinese animated cinema. Even so, the interviews provide useful evidence because they show how viewers actually describe accuracy, fluency, cultural preservation, and comprehension. These terms become more meaningful when connected with examples such as Tang poetry, the imperial examination, Yumen Pass, and court dance.

Future research could expand the sample to include viewers from more linguistic and cultural backgrounds, compare different subtitle versions of the same scene, and test how annotation length affects reading speed and cultural understanding. It would also be valuable to combine interview analysis with reception experiments, eye-tracking data, or post-viewing comprehension tasks. Such work could refine multimodal subtitle translation theory and offer more practical guidance for the international dissemination of Chinese animated films.

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