

## RESEARCH ARTICLE

# On the Translation of Documentaries Themed on the Chinese Nation from the Perspective of Translinguality: A Case Study of *Chinese Children*

Received: 06 May 2023; Revised: 05 December 2023; Published: 16 December 2023

**Jing Lei**

Minzu University of China, China

Email: [graceblack@126.com](mailto:graceblack@126.com)

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6450-3326>

**Yilin Yang**

Minzu University of China, China

Email: [yilinyang2022@outlook.com](mailto:yilinyang2022@outlook.com)

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0008-4764-2736>

**Shujia Yang**

Minzu University of China, China

Email: [1945223523@qq.com](mailto:1945223523@qq.com)

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0004-8804-4290>

---

### Abstract:

With the development of media technology, documentaries of the Chinese nation are used more and more as a vehicle to present natural scenery, local customs as well as the traditional culture of ethnic groups. Little research has been conducted on the translation of documentaries themed on the Chinese nation despite the study of such documentaries in terms of video creation and intercultural communication. The translation of documentaries is mainly constrained by the co-existence of the sound and the visual channels. This study applies translinguality in the analysis of *Chinese Children*, a multilingual and multimodal documentary space loaded with symbolic resources of Chinese ethnic groups, examines its transcending, converging and performative features and reveals how those features facilitate the translation. This study concludes when viewing the documentary as a translingual space, translation can better overcome the constraints. In languages, language boundaries can be transcended to find an equivalent translation creatively; In modalities, translation can draw on multiple modalities to bridge linguistic and cultural differences, as well as reach a balance between the sound and visual channels; In symbolic resources, translation should pay special attention to the expression process of semiotic resources in both acoustic and visual channels and how the symbols become performative.

**Keywords:** audiovisual translation, documentary translation, translingual practice, Chinese-English translation



## 1. Introduction

Chinese documentaries themed on the Chinese nation have given full play to the function of recording the times, presenting the economic, social and cultural development of ethnic areas and the colorful lives of people of various ethnic groups (“the Chinese nation” refers to “中华民族” all the 56 ethnic groups in China). These documentaries, on the one hand, carry the general codes of audiovisual media, like the linguistic code, the musical and special effects code, the sound arrangement code related to the acoustic channel, the photographic codes, the mobility code, and the graphic codes related to the visual channel (Chaume, 2004, pp. 13-16); on the other hand, they stand out from other genres for their rich Chinese ethnic culture. Therefore, their translation falls into the category of audiovisual translation with its own uniqueness. *Chinese Children* is such a documentary that covers the traditional culture and customs of eight ethnic groups, including Oroqen, Blang, Naxi, Tajik, Miao, Mongolian, Yao and Yi.

In this article, translinguality can be understood as the translingual practices with transcending, convergence and performative features from the aspects of languages, modalities and symbolic resources respectively. It is used in various fields, and there are several terms that it is often linked with, such as translanguaging, code-meshing, plurilingualism and so on. As pointed out by Canagarajah (2013, p. 9), “scholars are finding many terms in diverse domains and fields that suit their orientations, all of which help to develop a translingual paradigm in communication, literacy and pedagogy.” According to Horner and Alvarez (2019, p. 3), “scholars who now explicitly advance a translingual perspective have previously invoked other available terms to name what they would argue for.” In this article, although different scholars have adopted various terms to facilitate the advancement of their theories, all relevant terms quoted refer to translinguality, which is used as a general term to suggest the translingual perspective.

This paper aims to analyze how translinguality supports the translation of documentaries themed on the Chinese nation and summarize translation methods applied in the process from micro, meso and macro levels. Firstly, the paper reviews relevant literature of studies concerning the translation of documentaries and translinguality and identifies the gaps between the current research status and the research topic. Given that translinguality hasn’t seen much exploration in audiovisual works, this study examines such exploration from three angles, namely transcending in languages, convergence in modalities and performativity in symbolic resources. A brief introduction to *Chinese Children* is given before a more detailed analysis. Based on examples, the paper explains how translingual features are presented in *Chinese Children* and studies how the English translation of *Chinese Children* applies a translingual perspective in accordance with the documentary’s translingual features to overcome the constraint of the co-existence of the sound and the visual channels in documentary translation and creatively convey the meaning and theme of *Chinese Children*. Finally, the findings, limitations of this study and suggestions for future research are presented.



## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Translation of documentaries

According to Valdeón (2022, p. 373), the tendency in the twenty-first century has been towards micro-specialization. Prior to the twenty-first century, the translation of documentaries as a separate research area remained comparatively unexplored and was only acknowledged as one of the subfields of audiovisual translation (AVT), which did not draw much attention from academics. Only after the new century did it gradually attract scholars' attention. In the past 20 years, the majority of research on the translation of documentaries has been conducted from the viewpoints of subtitling and dubbing, voice-over, terminology translation, cultural-specific items, etc., which are mainly practice-oriented and empirical studies.

As a type of AVT, the translation of documentaries pays attention to traditional AVT forms such as subtitling and dubbing, and bears similar constraints that govern the translation. As introduced by Munday, common constraints include the co-existence of the sound channel and the visual channel (2016, p. 276), space and time, the image on the screen and the soundtrack in the source language (Linde & Kay, 1999, p. 3). Considerable research has been carried out to discuss linguistic translation strategies and techniques of subtitling and dubbing, while the issues embedded in AVT are diverse and request broader analytic models to bridge the gap between linguistic, multimedia, multimodal and multidisciplinary approaches (Díaz & Neves, 2015; Munday, 2016).

In terms of viewing the translation of documentaries as an independent subject, Espasa (2004) examined the causes of the frequent neglect of documentary translation, made the case that documentaries are distinct from other film and television works, and implied that there was no inclusive relationship between documentary translation and AVT. Matamala (2009) analyzed the main challenges in documentary translation in the light of work experience, focusing in particular on the working conditions of translators and the specific conditions of subtitling like terminology and speaking tone. Research on the translation of technical vocabulary is widespread since documentaries often involve a particular area of expertise. Matamala (2010) studied the terminology translation in science documentaries, and under her inspiration, Hanouille et al. (2015) proved that a bilingual glossary helped professional translators of documentaries reduce working time and terminological errors. Franco (2001) paid special attention to the translation of cultural-specific objects and advocated foreignizing translation. Likewise, Hoorickx-Raucq (2004) also examined the translation of culturally significant elements and emphasized the translator's function of mediating rather than simply translating discourse from one language into another.

Since 2012, the translation of documentaries has gradually attracted the attention of Chinese scholars, and its research is usually conducted under more developed translation theoretical frameworks, particularly Skopos theory, eco-translatology, and multimodality (Luo & Wang, 2017; Zhang, 2017; Xin & Chen, 2020). Some studies are carried out by the subtitlers to discuss the strategies and techniques of subtitling. For example, Cheng (2014) based on her subtitling of *Beautiful Nostalgia* explored how middle text and the changes of registers helped with the readability of subtitling and also concluded three difficulties in the subtitling, namely frequent changes of registers, ample middle text



and the genre of documentary. As documentaries can deal with a wide variety of subjects, the studies can also be categorized by topics. However, the existing case studies are limited to a narrow range of Chinese documentaries, with *A Bite of China* accounting for 42% of the research object in the past 5 years.

To sum up, previous research on the translation of documentaries revolves mostly around linguistic translation methods, while systematic theoretical frameworks that capture the inherent features of documentaries as audiovisual media about specific themes are seldom seen. Besides, when conducting research on the translation of Chinese documentaries according to topics, many topics are under-represented and there is a lack of comprehensive discussion in academia.

## 2.2 Translinguality

Translinguality is a cross-disciplinary studies and has been investigated both independently and as a perspective of other fields like linguistics, composition education, comparative literature and translation studies. Research on translinguality as a stand-alone topic has been conducted for nearly 50 years, and the last decade has seen many systematic discussions.

In the field of linguistics, Canagarajah (2013) has articulated a comprehensive theory of translingual practice, according to whom there are two key paradigmatic shifts in the translingual orientation. Firstly, communication can transcend individual languages, and secondly, it can transcend words, involving diverse semiotic resources and ecological affordances. The term “translingual” captures the dynamism of the steady mix of tongues, bodies and objects that shape communication. It is worth mentioning that from 2006 to 2017, Canagarajah published a series of works regarding translinguality, which caused lots of reactions and enriched the study of translingual practice. Some research falls in the area of applied linguistics while others are more concerned with second language writing and composition studies (Matsuda, 2013; Atkinson et al, 2015, Canagarajah, 2015).

In the scope of rhetoric and composition, representative scholars that propose translingual writing are Horner and Lu (2016), whose approach sees the difference of students’ linguistic and cultural backgrounds as a resource for producing meaning, and argues that language is performative and conventions of language use can be negotiated.

Kellman is one of the main exponents that studies translingual practice in literary studies, where translinguality is used as a theoretical lens. He defines translingual writers as those who write in more than one language or in a language other than their primary one (2003), using the number of languages as a standard.

In translation studies, scholars often combine translinguality with cultural translation, extending from literature translation to anthropological post-colonial theory, and explore the relationship between language and identity. For example, Scruggs (2015) took the study of colonial Taiwanese writing out of the two discourses of Chinese fiction and Japanese language texts, trying to disengage from the former colony to better understand colonial Taiwan and its postcolonial critics. Chatzidimitrio (2020) argued that texts, translated from one language to another, should not transform into but rather relate to their new host’s linguistic and cultural codes. In addition, many scholars of translation studies have



also discussed the relationship between translation and translanguality. Baynham and Lee (2019) shed light on the mutually embedded relationship between translation and translanguaging. Translation, in their view, is the accumulation of a number of intercultural moments in time, each of which contains a translanguaging space where languages congregate in a state of temporal suspension and bargain among themselves within the repertoire in order to produce a translated text. Yet, many mediation techniques, including translation, transliteration, code-switching/mixing, orthographic morphing, and others, lead to the emergence of a translanguaging space.

In China, research on translanguality is relatively insufficient, which can be divided into two main categories. The first one focuses on the Chinese translation of Lydia He Liu's book *Translingual Practice: Literature, National Culture and Translated Modernity, China, 1900-1937*. Through her research on translingual practice, Liu questions the validity of translation and uses certain loanwords and neologisms from the lack of equivalents to discuss how new words, meanings, discourses and modes of representation acquired legitimacy in early modern China while in contact with European and Japanese languages and literature. He Liu's "tokens of exchange", "interlingual writing", "translingual practice", "super-sign" and other discussions related to translation were systematized by Fei (2017) into the "New Translation Theory", which advocates translation studies and comparative literature to study cultural translation from an interdisciplinary perspective. "Translingual" is not only language-crossing, but also discipline-crossing, nation-crossing, culture/civilization-crossing and "translingual practice" is the cornerstone of the other three. Most scholars commenting on "translingual practice" according to the Chinese translation of the book have considered "translingual practice" as a tool for analyzing other topics from the perspective of their own research fields, but rarely have they commented on the nature and features of translanguality.

The second type of research attempts to introduce the concept of translanguality in sociolinguistics into different fields of research, such as literature (Lei, 2019a; Lei, 2019b), translation (Lei, 2021; Lei, 2022), and film analysis (Lei & Yan, 2022), aiming at expanding the scope of the theory's application. There are mainly two theoretical frameworks: the first one focuses on the key concepts of code-switching and code-meshing to explore the characteristics of translanguality; the second one analyzes how translingual features are presented in different practices from the aspects of languages, modalities and symbolic resources, which is also adopted by this paper.

According to the discussion above, as a developing theory itself, translanguality still has a high potential for new interpretation and application. To be more specific, translanguality has not yet been deployed in understanding the features of documentaries, nor in analyzing their translation. In China, the concepts of translanguality and its latest development are to be introduced and supported with more empirical evidence.

### 3. Interpretation of Translanguality

According to Canagarajah (2013, p. 6-7), two notions define translingual practice. Firstly, communication transcends individual languages, which highlights that languages are always in contact with and mutually influence each other and users have integrated multilingual competence. Language patterns and norms are always open to renegotiation and reconstruction in new contexts. Secondly,



communication transcends words and involves diverse semiotic resources, which underlines that semiotic codes are mobile and can be freely meshed in situated practice to make meaning. Semiotic resources (language as one semiotic resource among many) are used in the context of diverse modalities, including oral, writing, and visual modes, cooperating to create meaning. It is also argued by Ofelia and Li (2014, p. 18) that translanguaging has a sense of crossing language borders and living between different semiotic contexts as they interact with a complex array of speakers. Therefore, it can be concluded that translingual features are generated and presented from three aspects, namely languages, modalities and symbolic resources that make meaning.

As an audiovisual medium, documentaries have inner logical connections between sound and picture, and between picture and picture, which complement each other. The visual channel mainly includes elements like framing, camera movement, special effects, animation design and subtitles, and the audio channel includes dialogues, voice-overs, music, special sound effects and so on. The interaction of the visual and auditory expression in a quality documentary is holistic in nature and encourages the creative deployment of semiotic resources. Therefore, a documentary space can be viewed and analyzed as a spatial repertoire (Pennycook & Otsuji, 2015). What's more, unlike movies and animations that would plan the plots consciously, documentaries are distinguished by their authenticity, and the spatial-temporal contexts are dynamically changing, while the characters and symbolic resources are always traveling to new reality contexts that are open to be negotiated (Canagarajah, 2013, p. 8).

As articulated by Baynham and Lee (2019), the traditional conception of translation might be challenged when introducing a translanguaging perspective, which zooms into the turbulent space emerging out of the encounter between languages, language varieties, discourses, registers, and modalities. By going deeply into the in-between gap full of semiotic potentialities, translanguaging spotlights the contingent creativity inherent in communication in multilingual and multimodal settings. This idea bridges translanguaging and translation and explains how translanguaging facilitates the practice and analysis of translation.

By applying Baynham and Lee's theory, the translation of documentaries themed on the Chinese nation forms a translanguaging/translingual space composed of successive translanguaging moments, where different resources are constantly going across their own boundaries, as well as converging and negotiating. The fluid and creative use of multiple languages, language varieties, discourses, registers, modalities and symbolic resources such as images, gestures, music, and other non-verbal cues could create meaning and facilitate communication in documentaries themed on the Chinese nation.

Therefore, this study arrives at three unique features of translinguality. Firstly, from the angle of languages, translinguality refers to the practice of interacting across languages, which means that the boundaries of multiple languages, language varieties, discourses and registers are constantly transcended. Secondly, diverse modalities work together and integrate for meaning-making, reaching the effect of convergence. Thirdly, symbolic resources become performative in the fluid and flexible use of different semiotic systems. In other words, in the process of semiotic resources blending together to create new meanings and forms of communication, the translingual space of documentary speaks performatively.





## 4. Translinguality in the Translation of *Chinese Children*

Translinguality guides the translation of documentaries themed on the Chinese nation at three levels. At the micro level, its translation takes account of multiple languages and language varieties, through which neologism is applied to create new words and phrases; at the meso level, its translation is embodied in multimodality, which combines verbal and non-verbal semiotics in visual and acoustic channels to achieve the synchronization between sound and image; at the macro level, its translation follows the strategy of foreignization, by which the symbolic meaning of the documentaries stays faithful to the original to the maximum extent.

### 4.1 Introduction to *Chinese Children* (2016)

*Chinese Children* is the first documentary themed on the Chinese nation that adopts the perspective of children in China. To document and capture the true stories of children from ethnic groups in China, the production team spent four years visiting hundreds of villages, recording the languages and cultural heritage, natural scenery and local customs of different ethnic regions. It portrays the natural respect of the older generation for the traditional ethnic culture and the unique mark left by ethnic culture on the children. The first season covers the traditional culture and customs of eight ethnic groups: Oroqen, Blang, Naxi, Tajik, Miao, Mongolian, Yao and Yi. The running time of every episode is 25 minutes and as of April 2023, the eight episodes have amassed more than eight million views on CCTV-10, Bilibili, China Documentary Network, China Hunan TV, Youku and other domestic platforms.

It was selected into the third batch of recommended outstanding domestic documentaries by the State Administration of Press, Publication, Radio, Film and Television the same year it made its first public presentation in 2016. The State Council Information Office invited relevant experts to review the series, and they considered it suitable for the country's international communication and launched the documentary series overseas in 2018.

While the eight episodes cover eight ethnic groups and tell stories of different children separately, the shooting style of the whole season remains consistent, making the documentary a treasure-house of the Chinese nation's culture on the whole. Each episode centers around one ethnic group and opens with classic ethnic literature, such as epic poems, ballads and folklore, giving the viewers an initial impression of the history and characteristics of the ethnic group. Together with the citations come ethnic-style melodies, forming the pairing of words and music to express unique cultural symbols and reducing the use of images and narration to explain the background of the story. When specifying the geographical distribution of the ethnic group, the map and the main character are presented in the form of animation in lively colors, which enriches the expression of the documentary.

As for contents, the experiences of the ethnic children are the main storylines, and the ethnic cultural heritage acts as another plot clue. Visually, the documentary selects symbolic resources of ethnic culture for filming, and at the same time involves ethnic food, costumes, festivals and so on. Acoustically, there are both original dialogues and voice-overs, with the former in ethnic dialects, Chinese or even foreign languages, and the latter using a first-person narration to guide the audience throughout the story. Sound effects are also added with the development of the story to render the emotions of the characters and the atmosphere of the environment.



## 4.2 Methodology

*Chinese Children* has three characteristics that make it a suitable case for studying the translation of documentaries themed on the Chinese nation from the perspective of translanguaging. Firstly, its considerable influence and professionalism make it stand out among the rest. Secondly, it touches upon different forms of ethnic cultures, from literature, clothes, food to music, beliefs, festivals and much more, exploring various facets of ethnic cultures. Thirdly, translanguaging features are omnipresent in the documentary because of the rich semiotic resources it contains, and every episode can be considered as a collection of semiotic resources.

This study has adopted the methodology of sampling and textual analysis within the dataset comprising eight episodes from the first season of *Chinese Children*. Examples are divided into three parts, with each part drawing from 1-2 episodes. The first part chooses examples from the Mongolian and Miao episodes, the second part focuses on the Yi and Tajik episodes and the third selects examples from the Bland episode. These examples are presented in the following sections for illustration.

## 4.3 Languages: transcending boundaries

Communication involves treating languages as “mobile resources” (Blommaert, 2010, p. 49) and language patterns are open to renegotiation and reconstruction in new contexts (Canagarajah, 2013, p. 6). Translanguaging refers to the practice of interacting across languages, which means that the boundaries of multiple languages, language varieties, discourses and registers are constantly transcended. In *Chinese Children*, ethnic languages are abundant, such as Oroqen, Mongolian, Yi languages and so on, and most of the young protagonists can switch between ethnic languages and Chinese smoothly. The English translation blends naturally with the multiple existing languages and varieties, highlighting the transcending feature. Besides that, the crossing between language registers in different scenes is also significant, where the language boundaries are less defined and often neglected.

### Example 1

**ST (source text):** 蒙语里称摔跤手叫搏克手。（蒙古族 20:53）

**TT (target text):** Boker is the Mongolian word for wrestler.

In the ST, the protagonist is introducing the Mongolian word for wrestler in Chinese to the potential audience, who most likely speak Chinese too. “搏克” is the Chinese transliteration of the Mongolian word “Bökh”, while “搏克手” is not the accurate transliteration of the Mongolian word for wrestler in Chinese, which should be “搏克沁”. Some even refer to Mongolians as a “搏克沁” group (Wang & Zhang, 2015). In Chinese, one of the meanings of “手” is “a person who specializes in something or is good at a certain skill”, and “搏克手” absorbs the usage of “手” (hand) from Chinese to mean someone who is good at wrestling. The phrase breaks the linguistic norm in Mongolian, and it doesn’t seem to bother the speaker in this context when he tries to accomplish the communicative goal. A similar explanation of “hand” can be found in English too, which implies being skillful in doing something (Li, 2022). However, the translator didn’t rigidly follow the words. Instead, the “-er” suffix was added, which made “Boker” a hybrid language that embodies the





Mongolian word “Bökh” in sound, the Chinese “手” in meaning and English grammatical norm in form. The meshing of the three languages creates a new cross-cultural word “Boker”.

### Example 2

**ST:** 他们是柔道班里最萌的两个小家伙。（蒙古族 11:26）

**TT:** They're the two moest kids in the judo class.

The word “萌” in Chinese originally means “the first sprout of grass”. In Japanese, “萌え” is close to a noun, referring to a feeling of loving something. The love is often one-sided and full of desire, and therefore very likely to cause discomfort to the other person. Around the 1990s, under the sub-cultural influence of Japanese animation, manga and video games, the Chinese word “萌” derived a new meaning from the Japanese “萌え”. It was then used as a term to express strong love for fictional characters and later derived to similar emotions for various things. The word moe in English is also a slang term derived from the influence of Japanese pop culture, and is pronounced the same as the Japanese “萌え”. Here the Chinese word “萌” and the English word “moe” have the same connotation as in the Japanese language, and the “-est” suffix from English corresponds to the Chinese expression of “最”. All in all, the word “moest” reflects the fusion of Japanese, Chinese and English.

### Example 3

**ST:** 我是肌肉男，天天吃鸡肉。（苗族 01:37）

**TT:** I'm a total beefcake, and I eat meatloaf every day!

In this example, the original text is extremely colloquial, using short, neatly structured and catchy sentences. The logic seems to make no sense, but the repetition of the homophones “肌肉” and “鸡肉” achieves a humorous effect, reflecting the child's innocence. Beefcake in English does not mean beef-flavored cake or any food, but rather describes a man with a strong, muscular body, while meatloaf is a common North American delicacy that originated in Europe, which literally echoes and rhymes with beefcake. The new expression retains the sentence structure and meaning of Chinese, finds resources in English slang and relevant cultural knowledge, and complements itself with images of the child's funny face, abs and witty tone to make up for information missed in the translation, thus making it acceptable to non-native viewers.

### Example 4

**ST:** 苏敦：“阿吉吉不会说汉语，可他会唱汉语歌哟！”

阿吉吉：“红星闪闪，放光彩；红星灿灿，暖胸怀；红星是咱，工农的心；党的光辉，照万代；跟着毛主席，跟着党，闪闪的红星传万代！”（蒙古族 11:40）

**TT:** Su Dun: “Ajiji doesn't speak Chinese, but he sings Chinese songs.”

Ajiji: “The red star shines, glowing with rays; the red star twinkles, warming our hearts; the red star represents the heart of us workers and peasants; the Party casts light for thousands of



*generations; following Chairman Mao and following our Party, the brilliant star passes on for thousands of generations!"*

Translinguality is also reflected in the crossing between different registers. The voice-over of *Chinese Children* is recorded by the young protagonists after the shooting, which includes both oral narrations to link the plot and monologue with great literary and storytelling. The documentary's recording covers many different scenes. For example, in the episode featuring Mongolian children, there are conversations between friends and family, an election of the class committee, children singing, an opening ceremony and competitions at the Nadam Fair, covering a wide range of registers from formal and consultative to casual and intimate ones (Joos, 1967). This example is selected from one of the scenes where the narration ends and the singing begins. The lyrics come from the "Red Star Song", which has the characteristics of a patriotic red song with simple words, refined language style and a strong sense of rhythm. Therefore, the translation also retains the basic structure of the original text, with clear meaning and increasing emotional power, so as to express love and gratitude to the Party through the lyrics. In this example, when the situation changes, the register changes, and a blending of registers is created. The lyrics "following Chairman Mao and following our Party, the brilliant star passes on for thousands of generations!" does not follow grammatical rules strictly as it switches subjects from "we" in "we follow Chairman Mao and our Party to pass the brilliant star on for thousands of generations" to "the star", but can still convey meaning when understood clause by clause and scene by scene in the context.

#### 4.4 Modalities: converging for meaning-making

Language and semiotic resources make meaning in the context of diverse modalities working together, including oral, written, and visual modes. (Canagarajah, 2013, p. 7). Different from written works which are relatively rigid and static, audiovisual products offer dynamic and flexible space to incorporate diverse languages and modalities. Documentaries rely on both verbal and non-verbal cues to convey meaning, like dialogues, body language, facial expressions, plot structure, music, sound effects, animated icons and subtitles. These traits make it clear that translating documentaries entails more than just linguistic transfer; it also involves the transfer of content created by diverse semiotic modes. What's more, it focuses on the process of bringing different modalities together to create meaning. Translinguality goes beyond the language dimension and presents different convergence paths at the modal level. In the combination of multiple modalities, it constantly updates and flows to achieve the harmonious unity of text, audio, and visual images.

##### Example 5

**ST:** 这就是我们凉山彝族的朵洛荷，真是太震撼了。（彝族 22:43）

**TT:** This is the Duoluohu Dance of Liangshan Yi ethnic group. What a stirring performance!





**Figure 1. Duoluohu Dance**

In Yi language, “朵” (Duo) means fire and refers to torch, “洛” (Luo) means singing and “荷” (He) means songs. “朵洛荷” (Duoluohu Dance) therefore refers to the singing and dancing in the Torch Festival. Duoluohu is performed by a group of Yi women, who dance with yellow oiled paper umbrellas, humming local Yi songs when dancing, and constantly posing in different positions and changing team formations. If one only reads the subtitles, it is difficult for both Chinese and foreign audiences to understand what Duoluohu is without prior knowledge of Yi culture. But with the image of the women holding yellow oiled paper umbrellas, dancing together in their ethnic costumes and silver headdresses in elegant music, the audience can understand without extra effort. In this scene, the audience can learn about the special Yi dance from the child’s verbal narration through the text of the subtitles and appreciate the wonders of Yi folk art visually and acoustically.

#### **Example 6**

**ST:** 在过去，我们彝族人没有姓，都是父子连名。如果说爷爷叫平依尔西，那么儿子就叫尔西诗摸，到了孙子就叫诗摸果果。（彝族 11:33）

**TT:** In the past, we Yi people didn’t have surnames, but father-son linked names. For example, the order is *Pingyi Erxi* (father)—*Erxi Shimo* (son)—*Shimo Guoguo* (grandson).

In this case, diverse modalities, including oral, written, and visual modes are transformed to help the audience better understand the composition of names under the Yi father-son linked names system. Due to the influence of language and culture, different ethnic groups have different forms of name composition. Han Chinese people’s names have their surnames in front and their first names at the end, reflecting the long history of Han Chinese society and the clan concept of family name over first name. The name structure of English-speaking people is different from that of Han Chinese, usually the first name comes first and the last name comes second, with more emphasis on the individual. There is also a special name structure among other ethnic groups, Yi ethnic group for example, the father-son linked name system (Harrell, 2001). There are various forms of patronymics, from taking complete names of the fathers to parts, from only a few generations’ names to endlessly starting from the paternal ancestor. In the example, the protagonist orally pronounces the Yi names while the written Chinese subtitles imitate the Yi sound with Chinese characters: the last two characters of the father’s name are pronounced as the first two characters of the son’s name, and



similarly, the last two characters of the son's name pronounced as the first two characters of the grandson's name. In English subtitles, considering the written and instantaneous nature of subtitles, punctuation is manipulated to visually perform the relationship between the three names. The names are italicized, signaling that the oral-aural dimension is emphasized. Coupled with brackets pointing out the relationship between the owners of the names, hyphens are added between names, forcing the audience to focus on the construction of names and their order only. What's more, the capitalization also makes it easier to identify the parts of names that are taken from the fathers to the sons.

### Example 7

**ST:** 新疆塔什库尔干塔吉克自治县 (塔吉克族 02:25)

**TT:** Taxkorgan Tajik Autonomous County, Xinjiang



**Figure 2. Cartoon Effect**

The documentary's presentation is also enhanced by the use of colorful drawings to show the geographical locations of ethnic regions on the map while displaying the children protagonists in ethnic clothes with cartoon effects. As shown in the picture, the color of the area where Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region is located is deepened in dark green, and a Chinese caption in the hand-writing style of children saying the name of the area is printed above the picture, accompanied by sound effects and dynamic moves indicating the emergence of the location name. In this example, various specific modes are chosen for better communication. The layout and font of the written language in the caption, the ethnic clothes, the colors and moving effects of the map and children, the sound and animation accompanying the visual images converge to contribute to a better understanding of the translated region name and the ethnic group inhabiting there.

## 4.5 Symbolic resources: speaking performatively

Language stands as one out of many semiotic systems utilized in communication (Canagarajah, 2013, p. 7). Incorporating diverse semiotic resources like images, music, and non-verbal cues can aid in bridging linguistic and cultural differences. If translators can embrace the full range of symbolic resources available in the translanguaging space of the documentary, the theme of the documentary can be better performed and expressed.



In terms of symbolic resources, cultural symbols of ethnic groups are used throughout *Chinese Children*. All the cultural symbols are stated in the form of concrete material but further reflected in ethnic literature, ethnic music, festival activities and many other resources the documentary contains. Through those symbols, *Chinese Children* not only reflects the inheritance of traditions but also shows the development of ethnic culture in the eyes of contemporary children, which maximizes the “performative” function of the documentary in the growth stories of children from different ethnic groups. Here, “performative” is related to “translinguality” in that it is the feature and core function of symbolic resources in a translingual space. The performative function means being able to better express the themes of the documentaries rather than just creating meaning in the segments. In a documentary, there could be many different resources that highlight the theme directly or indirectly, but together they all embody the core ideas the producer(s) try to express.

### Example 8

Table 1. Symbolic Resources in Blang Episode

	Ethnic Group	Cultural Symbol	Ethnic Festival	Literature Quoted at the Opening
ST	布朗族	茶	山康节	我要给你们留下牛马，怕遭灾害死光， 要给你们留下金银财宝，怕你们吃完用光。 就给你们留下茶树吧， 让子孙后代取之不尽用之不竭…… ——芒景布朗族先祖 帕哎冷
TT	Blang	Tea	Shan Kang Festival	If I leave you cattle and horses, they would be killed by plagues; If I leave you gold and silver, they would be used up easily; I'll leave you tea plants, They will be inexhaustible for future generations…… ——Chief Aileng, Ancestor of Blang People in Mangjing

In the Blang episode, the cultural symbol of tea speaks performatively in the expression process of various symbolic resources. As a daily beverage in China, tea does not mean very much, but when turned into a cultural symbol that represents Blang culture in the documentary, it takes on a profound interpretation.

Tea, as a material medium, embodies the expression of Blang culture and becomes performative in interaction with other relevant semiotic resources that epitomizes the translingual feature in the episode. At the very beginning of the episode, a quotation from an ancestor of the Blang people is shown (as shown in the table above), which expresses the unique value of tea in Blang history. Here, tea takes on an implicit interpretation of the long history and diligent character of the Blang ethnic group, and this is achieved through literature form. At the end of the episode, the quotation is presented to the audience again in the form of reading in ethnic language acoustically, making the tea culture even hallowed.





Multiple scenes in the episode further prove tea's performativity, though tea might not always directly speak of its cultural meaning. When the children are having tea culture class at school, the filming shows tea sets and children's body movements, which expresses the modern development of Blang ethnic culture among children. Through the child's conversations with her grandfather about Ancient Tea Horse Road and tribe myths, with her grandmother about fermented tea, verbal codes centering around tea express the passing-down process of tea culture in the Blang ethnic group. Activities in the Shan Kang Festival like the ritual bath for the sculpture of the God of Tea, the praying to the Tea God, the tea picking, roasting and rolling, all express the ways how tea culture still plays a role in Blang people's life today, utilizing all resources in the repertoire, be it language, or music, gestures and many others. All in all, different semiotic resources speak performatively about Blang culture through the medium of tea.

To sum up, the translation of *Chinese Children* demonstrates the translingual features embodied in the documentary and how it creatively takes advantage of the translinguality to make meaning. Firstly, it transcends the boundaries of languages. Translators draw on the languages, varieties and registers in the spatial repertoire of the documentary as well as their own multilingual repertoires to carry out the practice of translation. Secondly, multiple modalities converge in the translingual space, such as linguistic texts, visual images and sound effects. In the converged space, diverse semiotic resources negotiate in tandem toward better translation. Thirdly, symbolic resources such as ethnic literature, festivals, music, and other verbal and non-verbal cues play important roles in the expression process. Translators dynamically utilize meaning-making resources for performative communication of the documentary theme.

## 5. Conclusion

This paper presents a case study of *Chinese Children* to explore the key translingual characteristics embedded in documentaries themed on the Chinese nation. This study gains knowledge about the translation methods applied, testifying to the application of translinguality in audiovisual translation. From the above analysis, this paper explores how translinguality is reflected in documentaries themed on the Chinese nation such as *Chinese Children* from three aspects of languages, modalities and symbolic resources. In languages, boundaries of multiple languages, language varieties, discourses and registers are constantly transcended. In modalities, diverse modalities converge for meaning-making. In symbolic resources, potential semiotic resources blend together to convey the meaning and theme of the documentary, thus becoming performative.

The English translation takes place in the multilingual and multimodal setting of the documentary and thus not only works as a language transfer, but interacts with all languages, language varieties, registers, images, music, and other symbolic resources to create meaning. It is found that translinguality can provide a flexible and creative approach that goes beyond traditional linguistic boundaries and embraces a full range of semiotic resources available.

However, this study has its limitations. First, as a case study, the small dataset could impact the generalisation of the findings. Documentaries can cover a wide range of topics but this study only touches upon one of them. Other documentaries like political documentaries, historical documentaries





and food documentaries might have different features. Second, analyzing translation under translanguaging is uncommon and the analytical framework adopted for this study needs to be improved. More efforts should be made to make it reflect the most recent development in translanguaging studies.

The findings from our analysis and the challenges we present suggest the need for further research into how translanguaging practice exists in Chinese documentary translation. Future studies might also explore documentaries themed on other topics, such as history, wildlife, and food. Looking ahead, two promising avenues for research come to mind: creating a resource repository that focuses on Chinese audiovisual works with historical significance and conducting quantitative research for more instructive insights. This would expand the sample size for audiovisual translation research. In conclusion, applying translanguaging theory to the translation of documentaries opens new research frontiers.

## Declarations and Acknowledgement:

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

This study is supported by the “Chunhui Program” under the Ministry of Education of the People’s Republic of China [HZKY20220001] and the project “Research on Audiovisual Translation of Works Themed on the Chinese Nation” of Minzu University of China [2022QNYL14].

The authors would like to thank the editors and reviewers for their insightful comments and suggestions, which have greatly improved the quality of this manuscript.

## References

- Atkinson, D., Crusan, D., Matsuda, P. K., Ortmeier-Hooper, C., Ruecker, T., Simpson, S., & Tardy, C. (2015). Clarifying the relationship between L2 writing and translanguaging writing: An open letter to writing studies editors and organizational leaders. *College English*, 77(4), 383-386.
- Baynham, M., & Lee, T. K. (2019). *Translation and Translanguaging*. Routledge.
- Blommaert, J. (2010). *The Sociolinguistics of Globalization*. Cambridge University Press.
- Canagarajah, S. (2013). *Translingual Practice: Global Englishes and Cosmopolitan Relations*. Routledge.
- Canagarajah, S. (2015). Clarifying the relationship between translanguaging practice and L2 writing. *Applied Linguistics Review*, 6(4), 414-440.
- Chatzidimitriou, I. (2020). *Translingual Francophonie and the Limits of Translation*. Routledge.
- Chaume, F. (2004). Film studies and translation studies: Two disciplines at stake in audiovisual translation. *Meta*, 49(1), 12-24.
- Cheng, W. (2014). 程维. 纪录片字幕汉英翻译研究——以纪录片《美丽乡愁》的翻译实践为例. 《上海翻译》, 02, 24-27. Storytelling in Documentary Subtitling: A Case Study of C-E Subtitling of “Beautiful Nostalgia”. *Shanghai Journal of Translators*, 02, 24-27.
- De Linde, Z., & Kay, N. (2016). *The Semiotics of Subtitling*. Routledge.



- Díaz Cintas, J., & Neves, J. (Eds.). (2015). *Audiovisual Translation: Taking Stock*. Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
- Espasa, E. (2004). Myths about documentary translation. *Benjamins Translation Library*, 56, 183-198.
- Fei, X. (2017). 费小平. 《美国华裔批评家刘禾“新翻译理论”研究》. 北京: 中国社会科学出版社. *A Study on New Translation Theory of Chinese-American Critic Lydia H. Liu*. Beijing: China Social Sciences Press.
- Franco, E. (2001). Inevitable exoticism: The translation of culture-specific items in documentaries. *La traducción en los medios audiovisuales*, 177-181. Servei de Comunicació i Publicacions.
- García, O., Li, W. (2014). *Language, Bilingualism and Education*. Palgrave Macmillan UK.
- Hanoulle, S., Hoste, V., & Remael, A. (2015). The Translation of Documentaries: Can Domain-Specific, Bilingual Glossaries Reduce the Translators' Workload? An Experiment Involving Professional Translators. *New Voices in Translation Studies*, (13).
- Harrell, S. (Ed.). (2001). *Perspectives on the Yi of Southwest China* (Vol. 26). Univ of California Press.
- Hoorickx-Raucq, I. (2004). Mediating the scientific text. A cultural approach to the discourse of science in some English and French publications and TV documentaries. *Jostrans* Vol. 3. 97-108.
- Horner, B., & Alvarez, S. P. (2019). Defining translanguality. *Literacy in Composition Studies*, 7(2), 1-30.
- Joos, M. (1967). The Five Clocks—A Linguistic Excursion into the Five Styles of English Usage.
- Kellman, S. G. (Ed.). (2003). *Switching Languages: Translingual Writers Reflect on Their Craft*. U of Nebraska Press.
- Lei, J. (2019). 雷静. “跨语际性”研究发展综述. 《外语与翻译》, 26(04), 59-64. Literature Review of “Translinguality”. *Foreign Languages and Translation*, 26(04), 59-64.
- Lei, J. (2019). 雷静. 跨语际小说中的身份建构研究. 《华中学术》, 04, 18-25. Identity Establishment in Translingual Novels. *Central China Humanities*, 04, 18-25.
- Lei, J. (2021). 雷静. 跨语际理论视域下新中式英语翻译——以“城市词典”为例. 《北方民族大学学报》, 06, 142-147. New Chinglish Translation from the Perspective of Translingualism: Taking UrbanDictionary.com as an Example. *Journal of North Minzu University (Philosophy and Social Science)*, 06, 142-147.
- Lei, J. (2022). 雷静. “跨语际性”视阈下的社会翻译学研究——以阿米塔夫·高希的《饿潮水》(2004)为例. 《复旦外国语言文学论丛》, 01, 157-162. Socio-translation studies under translanguality: a case study of The Hungry Tide by Amitav Ghosh (2004). *Fudan Forum on Foreign Languages and Literature*, 01, 157-162.
- Lei, J., & Yan, X. (2022). 雷静, & 闫欣. 中国当代电影的“跨语际性”特征——以《唐人街探案 2》为例. 《中南民族大学学报(人文社会科学版)》, 09, 151-157+187. “Translinguality” in Contemporary Chinese Movies: A Case Study of Detective Chinatown 2. *Journal of South-Central Minzu University (Humanities and Social Sciences)*, 09, 151-157+187.
- Li, L. (2022). 李丽君. “手”的隐喻和转喻英汉对比研究. 《现代语言学》, 2022, 10(10): 2249-2254. A Contrastive Study of Metaphor and Metonymy of “Hand” in English and Chinese. *Modern Linguistics*, 2022, 10(10), 2249-2254.
- Liu, L. H. (1995). *Translingual practice: Literature, national culture, and translated modernity—China, 1900-1937*. Stanford University Press.
- Liu, L. H. (2002). 《跨语际实践: 文学, 民族文化与被译介的现代性, 中国, 1900-1937》(宋伟杰译). 北京: 生活·读书·新知三联书店. *Translingual Practice: Literature, National Culture, and Translated Modernity—China, 1900—1937* (Song, W., Trans.). Beijing: SDX Joint Publishing Company.
- Lu, M., & Horner, B. (2016). Introduction: Translingual Work. *College English*, 78(3), 207-218.



- Luo, Y. & Wang, C. (2017). 骆云英, & 王晨婕. 目的论视角下纪录片字幕翻译策略的研究——以《美丽中国》为例. 《现代语文(语言研究版)》, 10, 120-123. A Study of Subtitle Translation of Documentary Film from the Perspective of Skopos Theory. *Modern Chinese*, 10, 120-123.
- Matamala, A. (2009). Main challenges in the translation of documentaries. *New Trends in Audiovisual Translation*, 109-120.
- Matamala, A. (2010). Terminological challenges in the translation of science documentaries: A case-study. *Across Languages and Cultures*, 11(2), 255-272.
- Matsuda, P. K. (2013). It's the wild west out there: A new linguistic frontier in U.S. composition. In A. S. Canagarajah (Ed.), *Literacy as translingual practice: Between communities and classrooms* (pp. 128-139). New York: Routledge.
- Munday, J. (2016). *Introducing Translation Studies: Theories and Applications*. Routledge.
- Pennycook, A., & Otsuji, E. (2015). *Metrolingualism: Language in the City*. Routledge.
- Scruggs, B. M. (2015). *Translingual Narration: Colonial and Postcolonial Taiwanese Fiction and Film*. Hong Kong University Press.
- Valdeón, R. A. (2022). Latest trends in audiovisual translation. *Perspectives*, 30(3), 369-381.
- Wang, J., & Zhang, T. (2015). 王建强, & 张涛. 《中国民族式摔跤教程》. 北京: 中央民族大学出版社 *Ethnic Wrestling in China*. Beijing: China Minzu University Press.
- Xin, H. & Chen, K. (2020). 辛红娟, & 陈可欣. 多模态话语分析视角下外宣纪录片翻译研究——以《四季中国》为例. 《对外传播》, 02, 54-56. A Study of Translation of Chinese Publicity Documentaries from Modality. *International Communications*, 02, 54-56.
- Zhang, Z. (2017). 张梓静. 生态翻译学视角看纪录片字幕翻译. *Documentary Subtitle Translation from the Perspective of Eco-translatology*. [Master's Thesis]. Beijing Foreign Studies University.

## About the Authors:

Jing Lei, Ph.D., associate professor, chair of the Translation Department at School of Foreign Studies, Minzu University of China. She obtained her M.A. at Graduate School of Translation & Interpretation, Beijing Foreign Studies University and Ph.D. at Tamkang University, Taiwan. She participated in the Institute for World Literature (IWL) program of Harvard University in 2015 and visited Indiana University in 2017. She has participated in many international seminars and academic exchanges. She's leading three provincial research projects and five school-level research projects. She has published more than twenty papers, three monographs, three textbooks and five translations. Her research areas mainly include translation theory and practice.

Yilin Yang is an undergraduate student at School of Foreign Studies, Minzu University of China. Her research areas mainly include translation theory and practice.

Shujia Yang is a graduate student at School of Foreign Studies, Minzu University of China. Her research areas mainly include translation theory and practice.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/)

© 2023 All Terrain Publishing