

Research on the Medio-translatology of Guangxi Yao Ethnic Minority Intangible Cultural Heritage from a Multimodal Perspective

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the translation and dissemination strategies of Guangxi Yao ethnic minority intangible cultural heritage from the perspective of multimodal translation theory. It aims to address language barriers, cultural distortion, and insufficient dissemination effectiveness in the current translation process. First, it analyzes the main content of Yao intangible cultural heritage and summarizes its key translation challenges. Based on this, it proposes enhancing cultural content transmission by integrating multimodal semiotic systems such as language, visuals, and audio. The research findings indicate that multimodal translation theory can effectively promote the protection and international dissemination of Yao intangible cultural heritage, providing a new path for the inheritance and innovation of ethnic minority cultures.

KEYWORDS

Yao intangible cultural heritage; multimodal translation theory; translation and dissemination strategies

1 Introduction

The Yao people have a rich intangible cultural heritage, including language, music, dance, festivals, and handicrafts, carrying profound historical and social significance. With the acceleration of globalization, the inheritance and dissemination of Yao culture have become increasingly important. Translation, as a crucial tool for cultural exchange and cross-cultural understanding, is not only about linguistic conversion but also about cultural dissemination and recreation.

Despite some progress in research on the translation of Yao intangible cultural heritage in recent years, many challenges remain. From a cross-cultural communication perspective, translation helps bring Yao culture to the international stage and enhances global cultural diversity protection^[1]. From a linguistic and cultural heritage perspective, translation supports the preservation and transmission of the Yao language, preventing language and cultural loss. From a sociological and identity perspective, translation helps construct cultural identity and promote ethnic cultural dissemination^[2]. However, existing translation efforts face issues such as language barriers, the limitations of single-mode translation, cultural misinterpretations, and inaccuracies, particularly in terms of cultural dissemination and audience reception.

Multimodal theory presents unique potential and value in this context. By integrating images, audio, video, and other media, it transcends the limitations of traditional text-based translation and conveys the essence of Yao intangible cultural heritage more comprehensively. Traditional cultural forms such as songs and dances can be presented more vividly through a combination of visual and auditory elements^[3]. This theoretical perspective provides new ideas and methods for translating Yao intangible cultural heritage, promoting its inheritance and development in modern society.

2 Overview of Multimodal Theory

2.1 Definition and Connotation of Multimodal Translation

Multimodal translation is a translation practice that integrates multiple semiotic modes, aiming to achieve cross-cultural communication and meaning construction through the collaboration of language, images, sound, and other modes^[2]. This theory benefits from multimodal research findings and is centered on recognizing the equal status of different semiotic modes in cultural dissemination. Translation activities should not be confined to linguistic conversion but should consider multimodal representations of cultural memory and transmission. This approach emphasizes interdisciplinary integration of semiotic systems, aiming to go beyond the traditional linguistic fidelity principle and make cultural dissemination more flexible and diverse^[1].

Multimodal translation involves the collaborative work of linguistic, visual, auditory, and interactive semiotic systems. Language, as the core carrier of information, conveys meaning through interaction with other modes. Visual symbols such as illustrations, photographs, and videos can intuitively present key cultural content and compensate for the limitations of linguistic expression. Auditory symbols, such as music, ambient sounds, and oral narrations, enhance emotional expression and narrative tension. Interactive symbols, including hyperlinks and dynamic media, enrich digital translation practices and provide audiences with a more immersive experience^[4].

2.2 The Value of Multimodal Translation in Cultural Dissemination

Multimodal translation plays a crucial role in cultural dissemination. With the advancement of media technology, translation has evolved from a single-text format to multimodal expressions. Against the backdrop of media shifts, multimodal translation integrates linguistic and non-linguistic modalities to achieve intuitive and emotional expression of information. The generation of meaning in translation relies not only on textual content but also on the collaborative influence of visual and auditory semiotic modalities^[2]. This “comprehensive” translation approach is particularly significant in constructing a national cultural image, as it allows cultural content to resonate more deeply with audiences.

Furthermore, the use of multimodal semiotics helps break language barriers, making cultural dissemination more inclusive and appealing, especially in the international promotion of ethnic minority intangible cultural heritage. In practice, multimodal translation can showcase the history and traditions of Yao culture through linguistic symbols while using visual modalities to present its clothing, dance, and other non-verbal cultural elements. Additionally, the incorporation of auditory modalities—such as Yao folk songs and Butterfly Songs—provides international audiences with a vivid cultural experience, thereby enhancing global recognition and understanding of Yao culture.

3 Translation and Dissemination Strategies for Guangxi Yao Intangible Cultural Heritage

3.1 Major Content of Yao Intangible Cultural Heritage

3.1.1 Yao Mythology and Legends

Yao mythology and legends are integral to the cultural identity of the Yao people, encompassing stories such as the Pan'gu Myth and the Miluotuo Myth. These myths reflect their understanding of natural disasters and project historical memories related to kinship and marriage stages^[5]. They not only embody the Yao people's perception of nature and society but also carry profound national spiritual connotations.

3.1.2 Yao Folk Songs

Yao folk songs serve as an essential artistic form for expressing emotions and preserving history. They are rich in variety and depth, including historical legend songs, love songs, custom songs, and lament songs. For example, The Song of Crossing the Ocean and The Song of King Pan narrate migration histories. In daily life, love songs are an essential means for young Yao men and women to express affection. Custom songs, closely tied to lifestyle practices, cover themes such as weddings, funerals, and festive ceremonies^[6].

3.1.3 Traditional Yao Dance

Traditional Yao dance, characterized by distinct artistic features and a strong ethnic style, plays a significant role in the intangible cultural heritage of the Yao people. The Long Drum Dance, which originated as an ancestral tribute to King Pan, simulates labor scenes and ritualistic customs, conveying the industriousness and beliefs of the Yao people. The Bronze Drum Dance, centered around rhythmic drumming, is performed with a lively and joyous style, becoming a highlight in harvest celebrations and cultural ceremonies^[6].

3.1.4 Yao Handicrafts

Yao handicrafts demonstrate the wisdom and creativity of the Yao people. Yao embroidery, known for its vibrant colors and intricate patterns, is mainly used for clothing decoration, embodying unique ethnic aesthetics. Batik craftsmanship, dominated by blue-and-white patterns, features rustic and natural designs inspired by flora and fauna, reflecting the Yao people's reverence for nature^[7].

3.1.5 Yao Festivals

Traditional Yao festivals are not only an important manifestation of folk culture but also a concentrated expression of the ethnic spirit. These festivals are diverse and serve as significant symbols of Yao culture. The King Pan Festival, the most grand and solemn festival of the Yao people, is centered on commemorating their ancestor King Pan. Through singing and dancing, participants express gratitude to their ancestors and their aspirations for a better life. Additionally, the Zhuzhu Festival (also known as the “Vow-Fulfilling Festival”) represents the Yao people's prayers for a bountiful harvest and peace while conveying their deep respect for nature. The Bird-Repelling Festival is celebrated through singing and dancing to drive away birds, symbolizing hopes for a prosperous harvest in the coming year^[7].

3.2 Challenges in Translating Yao Intangible Cultural Heritage

3.2.1 Linguistic Complexity

The Yao language is highly distinctive, belonging to the Sino-Tibetan language family with various dialectal branches, including "Mian" (Hmong-Mien language branch), "Bunu" (Miao branch), and "Lajia" (Tai-Kadai language branch) ^[5]. The diversity of these dialects requires in-depth research and tailored translation strategies. Additionally, the Yao language contains numerous culturally exclusive terms that lack direct equivalents in modern Chinese and English. While direct translation risks losing cultural depth, free translation may lead to ambiguity and loss of original meaning.

3.2.2 Non-Verbal Cultural Forms

Yao intangible cultural heritage extends beyond language to encompass numerous non-textual cultural expressions, such as music, dance, and totems. These elements often serve as the primary carriers of cultural sentiment and spiritual connotations. However, transforming these non-verbal forms into comprehensible text descriptions poses significant challenges. Furthermore, the movements, props, and stage designs embedded in Yao dance and rituals require multimodal approaches that incorporate visual content, as text alone cannot fully convey their cultural significance.

3.2.3 Balancing Cultural Fidelity and Global Adaptation

A critical challenge in translating Yao intangible cultural heritage is maintaining authenticity while ensuring accessibility for international audiences. On the one hand, original cultural content may contain metaphors and symbols that are difficult to translate accurately into foreign languages. On the other hand, translated content must align with the cultural background of the target audience to avoid comprehension difficulties caused by overly localized references. Achieving this balance requires strategic decision-making in translation, where linguistic techniques must be complemented by cultural and ethical considerations.

3.3 Solutions from a Multimodal Translation Perspective

3.3.1 Integrating Multimodal Semiotic Translation Strategies

From a multimodal translation perspective, the translation of Yao intangible cultural heritage requires the integration of multiple semiotic modes to achieve comprehensive representation and effective dissemination of cultural content. The linguistic modality, as the core of translation, plays a primary role in conveying information. During the translation process, special attention should be given to analyzing and interpreting unique linguistic symbols in Yao culture. A combination of literal translation and free translation should be employed to ensure the completeness of cultural connotations.

The visual modality is indispensable in expressing non-textual cultural elements. When translating Yao intangible cultural heritage, illustrations, photography, and digital design can transform abstract linguistic information into intuitive visual representations ^[4]. Additionally, audio and video formats can be used to recreate Yao music and oral traditions, enhancing the emotional expressiveness of the translation while organically integrating auditory experiences with linguistic translation.

3.3.2 Achieving Dynamic Balance in Translation

Digital dissemination platforms offer broad opportunities for incorporating interactive modalities. In the digital presentation of Yao intangible cultural heritage, features such as hyperlinks, dynamic displays, and interactive exhibits can enhance audience engagement. The integration of multimodal symbols not only strengthens the expressiveness of Yao heritage translation but also opens more efficient pathways for cultural dissemination.

In practice, achieving a dynamic balance is essential.

Firstly, the core characteristics of cultural symbols should be prioritized to ensure accuracy and completeness in translation. For instance, in producing a promotional video for the Long Drum Dance, our team combined textual explanations with dynamic visuals to highlight the aesthetics of the dance, compensating for the limitations of textual descriptions.

Secondly, the complementary functions of different semiotic modes can deepen translation depth and coherence. When a single mode is insufficient for comprehensive cultural representation, multimodal collaboration bridges information gaps, providing audiences with a more holistic cultural experience. This strategy enables broader international recognition and acceptance of Yao intangible cultural heritage.

3.4 Integration and Presentation of Multimodal Semiotics

3.4.1 Bilingual Brochures: Text Presentation with Illustrations and Annotations

In the translation and dissemination of Yao intangible cultural heritage, brochures serve as an important medium. Taking the Yao Oil Tea Brochure as an example, we successfully showcased the historical origins, production tools, ceremonial customs, and significance of oil tea in Yao daily life by integrating illustrations, concise bilingual texts (Chinese-English), and cultural annotations.

First, in terms of text design, we refined the original materials and used concise and vivid language to introduce the cultural background and unique value of Yao oil tea. To enhance readers' cultural understanding, we added background annotations alongside the bilingual translations. For example, the term "Youchazhui" was translated as "Youcha Pestle", accompanied by an explanation of its function as a tool for grinding tea leaves and seasonings. This additional context helped target readers comprehend the purpose and cultural significance of traditional tools.

Second, regarding visual presentation, we included high-quality images to illustrate the production process, utensils, and serving scenes of oil tea. For example, when presenting the "Tea Offering Ceremony", images clearly depicted a host serving tea to elders, paired with concise English descriptions, making the cultural meaning more engaging and accessible.

By combining text and visuals, the brochure and reading materials effectively conveyed the core aspects of Yao culture while enhancing readability and appeal for target audiences. This multimodal approach will be further applied to the translation and dissemination of other Yao intangible cultural heritage elements to achieve broader cultural promotion.

3.4.2 Translation of Yao Folk Songs: A Dual Expression in Classical Chinese and English

Yao folk songs, such as "The Song of King Pan" and "The Song of Crossing the Ocean", carry profound cultural and artistic value. During the translation process, we adopted a multimodal translation strategy, integrating linguistic translation and musical transmission to comprehensively present the cultural characteristics and emotional depth of these songs. First, in lyrics translation, we combined literal and free translation approaches to preserve the cultural connotations of the original lyrics as much as possible. For instance, the celebration scenes and symbolic customs in "The Song of King Pan" were supplemented with annotations in the translated text to help target readers understand cultural metaphors and historical contexts. Additionally, culturally specific terms like "King Pan" were clarified through footnotes and subtitles, ensuring completeness and clarity of information.

Regarding dissemination methods, we leveraged micro-video platforms to integrate lyrics translation with visual presentations, thereby enhancing the emotional impact and effectiveness of dissemination. Moreover, we produced bilingual songbooks, combining bilingual text, illustrations, and images to depict historical migration scenes of the Yao ancestors. This vividly reconstructed the struggles and cultural memories of the Yao people. The multimodal dissemination of these songs allows audiences not only to hear the melodies but also to visually explore the cultural narratives behind them. This provides new possibilities for the preservation and transmission of Yao intangible cultural heritage.

3.4.3 Micro-Video Production: A Comprehensive Expression of Text, Visuals, and Music

Micro-videos serve as a key format for presenting Yao intangible cultural heritage. Through a comprehensive multimodal approach, we produced two promotional videos: one showcasing the Long Drum Dance and the other promoting Yao embroidery. These videos not only highlight the depth and beauty of Yao culture but also provide audiences with a more immersive experience of Yao traditional arts.

In the Long Drum Dance micro-video, we combined visuals, sound, and language to enhance cultural impact. The opening scene features a panoramic view of a Yao traditional village, accompanied by background music and narration introducing the historical background and cultural significance of the Long Drum Dance. The camera then shifts to close-ups of the dancers, capturing their drum-beating movements and dance steps, illustrating the strength and unity of the Yao people. During the climax, rapid scene transitions and an intense rhythm highlight the power and emotional intensity of the performance.

The video concludes with breathtaking natural landscapes and dance sequences, accompanied by bilingual narration in Chinese and English, emphasizing the importance of preserving and passing down Yao culture. For the Yao embroidery micro-video, we focused on detailed craftsmanship and emotional storytelling: The opening scene features a tranquil morning in a Yao village, accompanied by Yao folk songs, creating a serene and immersive cultural atmosphere.

The narration then explains the historical background and cultural significance of Yao embroidery, displaying historical archives and traditional embroidery patterns. The meanings behind these designs are elaborated—dragon patterns symbolize strength and wisdom, while lotus flowers represent aspirations for a better life. The production process is

documented, capturing the artisans' step-by-step workflow, from designing patterns to selecting materials, threading needles, and completing intricate embroidery pieces. This highlights the craftsmanship's sophistication and uniqueness.

We used high-definition filming equipment to ensure that every frame accurately captures cultural details. Furthermore, we optimized subtitles using AI-powered language models, ensuring linguistic accuracy and fluency in translation. Once completed, the micro-videos were published on Bilibili and Douyin, leveraging social media platforms to reach a broader audience. By utilizing both visual and auditory elements, the videos effectively convey Yao culture, while the bilingual subtitles enhance cross-cultural communication. This innovative dissemination method not only strengthens the impact of cultural content but also enables more people to appreciate and explore the rich heritage of Yao intangible cultural traditions.

4 Conclusion

This study explores innovative approaches to the international dissemination and inheritance of Guangxi Yao intangible cultural heritage through the lens of multimodal translation theory. By integrating bilingual brochures, song translation, and micro-video production, we have constructed a vivid and efficient cultural translation and dissemination model that combines linguistic, visual, and auditory semiotics, showcasing the diversity and artistic charm of Yao culture.

Despite achieving notable progress, the study still has limitations. One of the key challenges is how to precisely convey the symbolic meanings and emotional connotations embedded in Yao culture through translation. Additionally, the deep integration of multimodal semiotics needs further refinement, especially in leveraging emerging technologies to enhance dissemination effectiveness. Future research will focus on further improving multimodal translation strategies, exploring more dimensions of semiotic integration, and making cultural dissemination more interactive and immersive. By doing so, we aim to contribute to the protection and global dissemination of ethnic minority intangible cultural heritage in an international context.

Funding

This work is supported by the Regional Innovation and Entrepreneurship Training Project for College and University students (Grant No. S202410595138).

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