

Analyzing the Reasons for the Popularity of Subtitle Translation in China from the Perspective of Media Translation

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Abstract

This thesis takes the wide use of Chinese subtitle translation as the research object, based on the theory of media translation, and explores the multiple reasons for its popularity in China. Firstly, starting from the development history of media technology, this paper analyzes the advantages of subtitles in terms of production cycle, cost control, cross-platform adaptability, etc., and how to gradually replace dubbing and become the mainstream form of film and television translation. Secondly, the paper deeply analyzes the unique value of subtitles in handling cultural-specific references (CSR), emphasizing that they enhance the audience's cross-cultural understanding ability through means such as annotations and semantic expansion. In addition, the paper also combines national language policies, the educational background of the audience, and the algorithmic recommendation mechanism of Internet platforms, pointing out that the popularity of subtitles is not only the result of the promotion of technology and communication demands, but also closely related to the cultural identity, language ability and acceptance habits of contemporary Chinese audiences. By analyzing subtitle group culture, the viewing preferences of "original audio + subtitles", and the role of subtitles in language learning, this paper holds that subtitles have evolved from a single language conversion tool into a multi-functional medium integrating information transmission, cultural construction, and audience participation. The paper ultimately points out that the wide application of subtitle translation in China is a reasonable product of the combined effect of technological change, policy guidance and cultural psychology, and also provides more possibilities for future cross-cultural communication.

Keywords

Media translation; Subtitle translation; Cultural specific reference; dub; Chinese culture

1. Introduction

The rapid development of science and technology since the end of the nineteenth century has driven the rapid development of the film and television industry around

the world, and with the continuous innovation of photographic technology, optical systems, sound equipment and communication media, the film as a new form of art has rapidly become an important carrier of cross-cultural communication. In this process, the importance of subtitling has been emphasized and has become an important means of connecting different languages and cultures. Subtitling has developed at an extremely rapid pace and formed a complete industry chain covering translation, production, distribution, auditing and distribution.

Subtitling is more than just a linguistic aid, it has become a vital part of media development in a global context.

According to the latest report of the consulting firm in July 2025, the global subtitling software market reached 2.73 billion dollars in 2024. In the future it is expected to grow to \$4.44 billion by 2031. This growth curve not only reflects the continuous iteration and commercialization of subtitling technology itself, but also benefits from the strong demand for multilingual audiovisual content from global audiences. China has always played a pivotal role in this, and has been a major player in the subtitle translation market since the 21st century.

Compared with audiences in European and American audiences, Chinese audiences rely on subtitles and use them significantly more often. Subtitles have always been used, regardless of language, in movies and TV dramas, as well as in small online dramas and short videos of several dozen seconds in new media. Especially in the 21st century, with the popularization of Internet technology, the rise of user-generated content (UGC) platforms, and the deep penetration of the “subtitle group” culture, the younger generation of Chinese viewers has gradually developed a preference for the combination of “original sound + subtitles”. Especially for overseas movie and TV productions, this method can not only show the real appearance of different cultures, but also satisfy the multimodal understanding of the meaning, and make up for the obstacles of language comprehension.

Among the various translation methods, subtitling has also taken the lead in recent years. Although the dubbing of overseas films and movies has been very popular since the 1950s, in the twenty-first century, young people are turning to “original sound + subtitles”, and dubbing has only become a “special offering” for specific scenes, mainly serving for children and the elderly.

Therefore, this thesis aims to analyze the reasons for the popularity of subtitle translation in China from three aspects: the development history of media translation, the concept of cultural specific reference, and China’s unique cultural factors, using media translation theory as a research tool.

2. The development of subtitles

In terms of the external advantages of subtitling, dubbing is too “rigid” to meet the needs of the current audience, and internally, subtitling is flexible and easy to present the source culture.

The development of subtitling in China did not reach its peak in the beginning, as dubbing was the dominant translation method in China around the 1950s. During this period and for the next forty years or so, dubbing began to be introduced on a large scale in China for overseas films and television productions, especially Soviet and Eastern European films, such as *Paul Kochagin* and *The Common Soldier*. In this context, dubbing was a product of the state language policy and ideological guidance that had to be demanded. In the 1990s, the state encouraged the vigorous promotion of the popularization of Putonghua, so the use of Putonghua, the standard for broadcasting and hosting, was part of the state's cultural policy. Moreover, the introduction of a large number of overseas works had to be in line with our audience's receptivity and national political ideology. The content and style of movie and television works need to be softened by dubbing to make them gentle, proper and standardized. For example, in the original Soviet film *Lenin in October*, Lenin speaks very fast, with short, high pitched speech, a strong Russian accent with a strong sense of political agitation, and the intensity and urgency of the revolution is shown to the fullest. In the 1950s, Lenin, dubbed by Beifang actor Bi Ke, deliberately slowed down his speech and spoke in a calm tone, displaying the image of a firm and rational wise leader. Through the power of dubbing, the context of the revolution is corrected, made more upright, rationalized and with a strong educational effect.

In the 1980s and 1990s, the influx of Hong Kong-Taiwan dramas and Hollywood films completely ushered in the golden age of dubbing. A number of high-quality translations were widely circulated, influencing the movie-watching habits of a generation of Chinese viewers. However, with the change of time, the change of audience structure and the development of information technology, dubbing has gradually taken a backseat to serving specific groups and scenes, such as children's animation, elderly channels and accessible audio-visual content in some public places.

This is an unavoidable problem caused by dubbing. While dubbing can unify ideologies, it also removes differences between cultures and makes different linguistic features the same. For example, slang, catchphrases and dialects in the original film or television are standardized into standard Chinese in the dubbing. Regardless of the class and social background of the protagonists, the way they speak is highly uniform. The lines with a stage accent often take on a very "paradigmatic" and written character expression, such as "oh, my god. It is a challenge to perfectly convey the elements of the source culture to the target culture audience in such an elegant form.

In contrast, subtitling has many advantages over dubbing. First of all, subtitles are becoming the mainstream choice because they are more flexible, low-cost, and easy to distribute across multiple platforms. With the popularity of smartphones, tablets and other mobile devices, fragmented viewing has become the norm, and viewers often rely on subtitles in silent mode to get information while commuting, standing in line or taking a short break. In addition, platforms' algorithmic recommendation mechanisms are more inclined to push content with subtitles, especially the au-

to-captioning function in content platforms such as TikTok, YouTube, and B-station, which greatly improves the accessibility and dissemination efficiency of videos.

Secondly, subtitle not only fulfills the basic function of language conversion, but also gradually evolves into a composite symbolic carrier for cultural interpretation, information supplementation and emotional communication. On the basis of retaining the original context, it can deal with culturally-specific references (CSRs) through annotation, transliteration, translation mixing, so as to help viewers better understand and accept foreign cultural contents. This functional advantage is especially prominent nowadays, when multilingual and multicultural contents are becoming increasingly rich.

China's subtitle culture did not develop overnight. As early as the early 2000s, a group of private subtitle groups active on the Internet, such as Renren Movie and Shooting.com, began to experiment with high-quality translation production and sharing. While disseminating overseas movie and TV works, these groups have also provided viewers with a large number of "original sound + subtitle" versions, whose language style, translation strategy, and cultural annotations are even more popular with young users than the official versions. It can be said that the rise of subtitle culture not only promotes the widespread use of subtitles, but also profoundly affects the audience's perception and expectation of subtitles, gradually forming a "subtitle-first" cultural consumption structure.

The rapid development of subtitle culture stems from the limitations of dubbing in the context of the development of the times, as well as the advantages of subtitle culture itself, which makes today's young people more and more inclined to watch works with subtitles.

3. The emergence of subtitles conforms to the development trend of media translation

In terms of media translation itself, subtitling is more in line with the objective trend of media translation. Media translation is to translate such contents as movies, TV dramas, variety shows and cartoons, which have both images and sounds, into the target language. These movies and TV programs may be domestic or imported from overseas. Media translation is also divided into various categories, such as subtitle translation, dubbing translation, narration translation, and visually impaired translation, to name a few. The concept centers on translating various media content into other languages so that people from different countries can see and understand them.

Since movies are global products, media translation is indispensable. At the beginning of the twentieth century media translations like dubbing and subtitling were underdeveloped due to the fact that in the early days movies were predominantly silent and could be understood by people in different languages all over the world, for example, the movies of Chaplin and Eisenstein. Media translation at this time was

mainly based on narration, where someone stood behind the curtain of the movie and read the lines aloud to people who didn't know them. But when talkies appeared in 1927, and especially after World War I, when films went from small shorts to large features, and when cinema lighting and cinematography became more professional, the problem of "regionalization" had to be solved. Initially, the same movie was re-translated in different countries, for example, *Dracula* and *The Blue Angel* were made in two or three languages, but the cost of filming was too high, and the result of the movie's revenue was not satisfactory. That's why dubbing was developed.

Dubbing was once the norm in a time when media technology was not yet developed, as it was able to eliminate linguistic barriers while maintaining the audience's viewing fluency. Especially during the Cold War after the 1950s, many countries used dubbing as a tool for political communication and cultural importation. For example, the Soviet Union and China commonly used dubbing when importing foreign films, and formed a very typical translation accent. However, with the development of technology, dubbing has begun to be gradually pushed out of its core position because of its higher cost, higher labor input and longer cycle.

Subtitles, especially those that are automatically generated and edited in real time, are gradually replacing traditional dubbing with the help of technological innovation and are becoming a more frequently used and adaptable form in media translation.

Since the beginning of the 21st century, fundamental changes have occurred in information dissemination media. Film and television works no longer rely on movie screens or television broadcasting channels, but have gradually migrated to Internet platforms, mobile terminals and multi-screen interactive systems. Against this backdrop, subtitles, with their advantages of flexibility, speed and low cost, have quickly adapted to the demands of emerging communication models. First of all, the popularization of digital production tools has greatly lowered the technical threshold for subtitle generation. From the traditional manual axis marking and frame-by-frame pairing to the widely used time-coded subtitling, speech recognition software (ASR), machine translation (MT), and automatic speech synthesis technology (TTS) nowadays, the production process of subtitles has achieved a high degree of automation and standardization. This not only makes subtitle production more efficient, but also promotes the transformation of subtitles from "manually translated additional content" to "a standard feature of the platform".

Especially with the support of artificial intelligence and big data, subtitles have gradually brought viewers an experience far beyond dubbing. For example, China's mainstream movie and TV platforms, such as Aiqiyi, Youku, and Tencent Video, all have algorithmic recommendation mechanisms and platform content management. With this feature, the entire film and TV publishing process will automatically embed subtitle uploading and recognition templates, while supporting users to customize fonts, colors, positions, and even call the multilingual subtitle version during the viewing process. This increase in operational freedom not only enhances user

experience, but also brings higher traffic conversion rate and user stickiness to the platform's content operation. From a communication perspective, subtitles are transforming from a means of translation to a part of the media interface, upgrading their status from an auxiliary tool to a structural element involved in content production and distribution. Moreover, major Chinese companies have launched subtitle generation engines, which use AI for speech-to-text, semantic recognition, machine translation and subtitle segmentation, making the process of subtitle generation not only less costly, but also faster. For example, Baidu Input Method and Xunfei Hear provide minute-level automatic transcription services, which greatly reduces the threshold of subtitle production in film and TV post-production.

In addition, the ability of subtitling to be “multimodal” gives it an advantage in the new era of media communication. Compared with dubbing, subtitling not only does not interfere with the original sound, but also forms a synergistic communication mechanism with video and sound, which is in line with the “Multimodal Discourse” proposed by Kress and van Leeuwen. In this sense, subtitle is no longer just a language replacement tool, but also an important medium for information visualization and cultural semantic increment. For example, in recent years, subtitles in many documentaries, knowledge videos, and film footages have taken on the functions of emphasizing semantic points, displaying terminological explanations, and even expressing emotional colors. This functional expansion has prompted subtitles to become part of the narrative structure, not just a result of language migration. Without the interference of dubbing, viewers are able to feel the differentiated cultural background of the film through the scenes, characters' expressions and tone of voice.

Starting from the development path of media technology, the popularity of subtitles in media translation is not accidental but the result of the coordinated evolution of multiple factors. On the one hand, subtitles meet the communication demands in the new media environment with their advantages of low cost, high efficiency and cross-platform adaptation. On the other hand, subtitles can preserve the differences between different cultures and more truly present the diversity of world cultures and concepts. It is no longer merely a means of translation, but the crystallization of media practice under the integration of language, culture and communication technology.

4. Subtitles can solve the CSR in the film relatively perfectly

Another major reason for the popularity of subtitles in films and TV series lies in the fact that it is easier to address the cultural specific references involved in the films.

“cultural specific reference” refers to words, expressions or symbols with special meanings that exist in a particular culture. These contents are usually closely related to a certain region, country, ethnic group and social background, and it is difficult to find corresponding alternative words in the cultures of other countries. For instance,

the phrase “morning tea” in Guangdong is hard to find a more appropriate alternative in the English context. Although alternative words have been found in translation, the understanding of a unified concept varies among different cultures. Therefore, it is necessary to retain the information of the original culture or help the audience understand through other means. And subtitles can better solve this problem.

Cultural specific reference can simply be divided into three different categories: Geographical CSR, Ethnographic Reference and Social CSR, of which the latter two are the most difficult in media translation.

Geographical CSR usually refers to a specific geographical area or is related to a geographic location. These geographic locations or landmarks are indicative of a particular culture or characteristic. For example like New York, London and Paris. People can easily think of the skyscrapers of New York, the rainy days of London and the romance of Paris through these words. Or like some iconic geographical classics such as the Eiffel Tower, the Great Wall and the Statue of Liberty. Even with the use of dubbing, people can easily understand the cultural message of the movie through their own knowledge base.

Ethnographic Reference refers to elements related to the lifestyle, habits, beliefs and social structure of a particular cultural group. These refer not only to different languages, but also to the daily activities, rituals, lifestyles and values of the culture. Examples include the Japanese culture of “wafu”, the ritual of eating sushi, or the Cantonese culture of morning tea. The content and understanding of these cultures can be difficult for viewers from other countries. These national characteristics are strongly localized and specific.

Social CSR is similar to Ethnographic Reference in that it refers to elements related to a particular social group or class, such as festivals, customs, and so on. Examples include Chinese New Year, Thanksgiving in the US and Carnival in Brazil. If it is a relatively well-known holiday, it may be easy to understand, but more often than not, it has strong cultural exclusive attributes, especially in the social system, social etiquette, legal habits and so on. For example, the “tipping culture” that frequently appears in American movies and TV shows may be difficult for most Asian viewers to understand its social significance. Subtitles can be interpreted through extended translation strategies, such as translating “tip” as “a tip given to a waiter after consumption (a common custom in the United States)”, retaining the original word with a slight explanation to avoid cultural dislocation.

For example, in legal dramas, terms such as “plea deal” and “Miranda rights” are commonly used, and direct phonetic translation or direct translation will result in the target language viewers not being able to understand the socio-legal context. In this case, the subtitles can adopt the method of “term + explanation”, such as “Miranda rights”, to complete the meaning by adding information. This kind of explanation is usually embedded at the top of the movie, which can help the audience to quickly cross the cultural differences without affecting the overall presentation of the

movie.

Compared with dubbing, subtitles do not have to take into account the dubbing actor's speed of speech, mouth shape, mood and other matching problems, so they can carry more cultural explanatory information, especially for legal dramas, medical dramas, political films and other high-density CSR film and television texts, subtitles have a stronger explanatory and illustrative function.

Moreover, in the global context of film and television, the preservation of original cultural features is increasingly advocated. In the translation standards of international platforms such as Netflix, Disney+, YouTube, the principles of “retaining as much as possible the original cultural terminology” and “supplementing with appropriate annotations” are generally emphasized. This trend also reflects that subtitles have gradually become the “preferred form of translation” for global cross-cultural communication. Take *The Squid Game* as an example, the multilingual subtitled version of the movie retains such Korean social background vocabulary as “won,” “Gangnam,” and “designer bags,” supplemented by concise annotations, which ensures basic comprehension and cultural immersion for global audiences. This ensures basic understanding and cultural immersion for viewers around the world. In contrast, some of the English versions have been criticized for “cultural undermining” due to the replacement of cultural terminology, which also validates the advantages of subtitles in CSR translation.

The effectiveness of subtitles in handling CSR also benefits from their alignment with the cultural acceptance structure of the target audience. It is pointed out in Reception Aesthetics and Stuart Hall's “decode-encoding” theory that the audience's comprehension ability is not passive reception, but active decoding based on their social and cultural background and cognitive framework. Subtitles retain the original cultural elements and, through certain annotations and visual prompts, can quickly help the audience generate corresponding associations, thereby guiding the audience to construct the corresponding cultural significance.

For instance, the numerous interactive bullet comments of overseas TV dramas and films on Bilibili itself constitute a kind of “collaborative translation” mechanism. After decoding the basic meaning of CSR through subtitles, viewers supplement their own explanations, background information or cultural comparisons in the bullet comment section, further enhancing their understanding of the original culture. This multi-level communication model of “subtitles + social interaction + reprocessing” has become a unique cultural acceptance mechanism in the context of digital media, and it also indirectly proves the core value of subtitles in CSR translation.

Subtitles demonstrate extremely strong flexibility and cultural adaptability in handling different cultural characteristics, and the amount of information they can process and carry is far greater than that of dubbing and other media translation forms. More importantly, subtitles themselves, as “textual translations”, inherently possess interpretability and extensibility, and can achieve the dual goals of language

transfer and cultural reproduction in cross-cultural communication.

5. Modern Chinese audiences tend to prefer subtitle translation

During the evolution of the way Chinese film and television language is accepted over the past few decades, from the dubbing viewing mainly based on dubbed films to the wide popularity of “original sound + subtitles” today, the audience’s preferences actually reflect profound social and cultural motivations. Especially in contemporary China, the widespread acceptance and reliance of subtitles among audiences not only stem from the natural evolution of viewing habits but are also profoundly influenced by national language policies, media governance strategies, and the degree of educational popularization.

The preference of Chinese audiences for subtitles stems from political advocacy and is related to the educational background of contemporary audiences. In China, since 2018, the State Administration of Radio, Film and Television has clearly stipulated the subtitle function for audio-visual programs. A large number of online variety shows, TV dramas and film programs must provide standard subtitle versions. Bilingual subtitles are also generally required to be embedded in educational videos and open courses in colleges and universities. The transformation from technical requirements to policy requirements, this shift from “can be done” to “must be done”, marks a further institutionalization of the status of subtitles.

With the change of national cultural governance strategy, especially the promotion of “multicultural coexistence” and “independent decoding ability”, subtitle translation has gradually been incorporated into the mainstream support vision as a more open and multi-interpretation space translation form. While presenting the original appearance of the foreign language, subtitling is accompanied by concise and accurate Chinese explanations, which is in line with the national communication advocacy of encouraging viewers to have “cross-cultural comprehension ability” and “independent decoding ability” in recent years. For example, the National Language and Literature Development Report (2021) proposes to strengthen people’s “acceptability, judgment and discernment” of multilingual content, which can be seen as an indirect encouragement of the original sound + subtitle format.

In the context of the popularity of online platforms, the subtitles of bilibili, Aiqiyi and Tencent videos not only function as a translation of the content, but also become a means for viewers to participate in the construction of culture. Viewers are able to interact with each other in the form of pop-ups. Such pop-up subtitles transform subtitles from a translation tool into a new interactive space for cultural and information exchange. This is highly compatible with the state’s cultural communication philosophy of encouraging the decentralization of online culture and independent innovation. It can be argued that political advocacy does not directly require viewers to watch subtitled content, but rather indirectly contributes to the formation of viewers’ preference for subtitles within a more macro cultural governance strategy.

National policies and online platforms have allowed subtitles to shape viewers' viewing habits in the opposite direction. With the rise of viewing trends such as "vertical screen video," "silent browsing," and "fast-paced information acquisition," viewers have become increasingly reliant on subtitles during fragmented time. Research shows that more than 70% of young Chinese viewers prefer to watch foreign-language movies and TV programs in their original language with subtitles; even for Chinese-language videos, many choose to turn on the subtitles in order to access the information more accurately. This change in reception habits triggered by media technology further reinforces the centrality of subtitles in the current communication landscape.

In addition to policy guidance, the prevalence of subtitles in China is also related to the educational level of today's Chinese audience. The target audience of today's overseas movie and TV dramas in China is mainly young people of the Z era. This group of viewers has grown up on the basis of the country's vigorous implementation of nine-year compulsory education and encouragement of higher education. Contemporary audiences generally have high reading ability and information processing ability. Especially in terms of English language learning, foreign language teaching starts from the third grade of elementary school or even earlier, so that generation after generation of viewers are equipped with basic English vocabulary comprehension and contextualization skills, laying a solid foundation for the "original sound + subtitle" method of movie watching.

According to data released by China's Ministry of Education in 2023, the national university enrollment rate has exceeded 57%, and the pass rate of English four or six levels has been increasing year by year. This means that more and more viewers are able to rely on a certain amount of language accumulation to understand foreign-language content through subtitles rather than relying on completely "transformed" dubbing when facing foreign-language films. This acceptance strategy of "consensus understanding + self-interpretation" is the unique advantage of subtitle translation.

In addition, subtitles provide a mode of "language comparison" that has become a channel for viewers to learn languages, especially for English learners, who can not only improve their listening comprehension, but also accumulate authentic expressions by comparing subtitles with the original sound. For example, the Renren Movie and TV Subtitle Group, once the most widely known folk subtitle group in China, was established in 2002 by a group of overseas students and Internet translation enthusiasts who translated for free. The group was formed in 2002 by a group of overseas students and Internet translation enthusiasts who translated for free. With the intention of training their English skills, they began to quickly translate American dramas, Japanese dramas, and public lectures into Chinese subtitles. The translation scope of RenRen covers Europe, the United States, Japan, South Korea and other countries, and has translated many outstanding overseas works such as *Game of Thrones* and

The Big Bang Theory. It has gradually become a high-quality film and television platform, and its bilingual subtitles have a wide audience, which is also referred to as a “must-have resource for the American drama party” by the audience. On this basis, it has gradually cultivated the Chinese audience’s acceptance of subtitles.

Therefore, “watching the original soundtrack with subtitles” is no longer merely a means of understanding the content, but has become a way to accumulate cultural capital and enhance oneself. Unlike the “passive reception” of dubbing, the “active comparison, selection and judgment” in the process of subtitle reading precisely conforms to the cultivation goals of “critical thinking” and “cross-cultural literacy” advocated by contemporary education.

Conclusion

This thesis takes “the extensive use of subtitles in Chinese media translation” as the core issue, and combines media translation theory with the social and cultural context of China to explore multiple reasons for the prevalence of subtitles in the Chinese context. Through historical review, technical analysis, cultural preference investigation and audience research, this paper attempts to establish a clear explanatory framework between theory and reality, demonstrating how subtitles, as a form of media translation, have gradually taken the leading position and reflecting the acceptance strategies and media behaviors of Chinese audiences in the new era.

First of all, from the perspective of the development history of media translation, the emergence and popularization of subtitles have a clear technical logic. From silent films to sound films, language barriers have become the primary challenge in cross-cultural communication, and both dubbing and subtitling strategies have successively emerged as coping measures. However, with the rapid development of digital technology and the popularization of online platforms, subtitles have gradually replaced dubbing as the main translation method due to their advantages such as short production cycle, low cost, and quick online availability. Meanwhile, the presentation form of subtitles synchronizing with the original sound also meets the audience’s psychological expectations for the original appearance and authenticity of the content, forming a translation paradigm that conforms to the context of new media.

Secondly, subtitle is not only a means of language transformation, but also assumes the function of interpretation and guidance in cross-cultural communication. In the face of specific cultural entries, social metaphors and humorous mechanisms in the source language, the “explicit” processing of subtitles, including annotations, explanations and semantic expansion, provides the audience with an acceptance path of “interpretation + self-interpretation”, enabling the audience to actively construct their own interpretations during the viewing process. The “explicit” processing of subtitles including annotation, paraphrasing, semantic expansion, provides viewers with a path of “interpretation + self-interpretation”, enabling them to actively

construct meanings in the process of watching. Especially in the viewing culture formed by early Chinese subtitle groups (Renren Film and TV), subtitles are not only a language bridge, but also a learning resource. The Chinese-English subtitle format has become an important tool for countless English learners to build up their vocabulary, improve their listening skills, and develop a sense of language. This folk-driven “language learning subtitle acceptance model” constitutes the unique ecology of Chinese subtitle culture.

Third, the popularity of subtitles is also closely related to the cultural preferences and political advocacy of Chinese viewers. From the state’s promotion of Putonghua and opposition to dialect dubbing, to the long history of melodramatic narratives that have strengthened audiences’ adaptation to linguistic norms and mainstream expression, to the improvement of the audience’s overall English language proficiency in the context of the popularization of higher education in contemporary times, subtitles are no longer an obstacle but rather a convenient tool for connecting language and thinking. The younger generation of viewers prefers to watch movies with original sound and subtitles not only out of linguistic interest, but also as a reflection of their identity and cultural recognition, they want to hear “real” language and understand ‘original’ expressions, and through subtitles, they are able to understand the “original” expressions. They want to hear the “real” language, understand the “original” expression, and decode the broader cultural world through subtitles.

In conclusion, the widespread use of subtitles in China is not merely a simple language alternative, but rather a reasonable outcome formed by the interweaving of multiple forces such as technological change, communication strategies, cultural cognition, and educational structure. The development of subtitle translation not only enriches the practical forms of media translation but also provides more flexible solutions for cross-cultural understanding. Through systematic analysis, this paper reveals the rise path of subtitles as a form of media translation in China, and verifies the inevitability and rationality of its existence from multiple dimensions such as communication studies, linguistics, and social culture. This research not only helps us understand the media acceptance characteristics of Chinese audiences, but also provides a useful thinking direction for the future development of media translation.

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