

# *A Report on the C-E Subtitle Translation of the Documentary *The Local Records of China: Dangtu Anhui* (Excerpts)*

Tang Chenrui<sup>1,a</sup>, Lin Min<sup>2,b,\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Foreign Languages College, Minnan University of Science and Technology, Shishi, Quanzhou, China

<sup>2</sup>Foreign Languages College, Minnan University of Science and Technology, Shishi, Quanzhou, China

<sup>a</sup>1347116463@qq.com, <sup>b</sup>350498871@qq.com

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**Abstract:** With absorbing introduction and exquisite images, the documentary *The Local Records of China: Dangtu Anhui* fully shows the cultural heritage of Dangtu County. Moreover, its subtitles, with strong cultural flavor, are beautiful, smooth and concise, so that the translator chose it as translation materials. This report, guided by André Lefevere's Manipulation Theory, combined with specific cases, explores how the translator can rewrite the original text to the greatest extent under the manipulation of ideology, patronage and poetics, and find the translation techniques suitable for subtitles translation in humanities documentaries. In the report, under the manipulation of ideology and patronage, transliteration and annotation can effectively deal with proper nouns and culture-loaded words. While under the manipulation of poetics, the translator analyzes from the perspective of lexical level and syntactic level, literal translation, substitution, voice shifting and information restructuring play a very important role in the process of translation. Through this translation practice, the translator believes that Manipulation Theory plays a strong guiding role in the translation of documentary's subtitles. Hopefully, the effort of this translation practice could shed light on the C-E translation and study of humanistic documentary subtitles, and make a modest contribution to the promotion of Chinese history and culture.

## 1. Introduction

In the context of cultural “going out”, Chinese humanities documentaries are an important means for the country to effectively spread Chinese culture to the world and improve China's cultural soft power<sup>[1]</sup>. The national large-scale cultural image project, *The Local Records of China*, was first released in May 2017. It plans to record the history and culture of more than 2,300 county-level cities. The humanities documentary mainly presents the great achievements and changes made in economic and social construction across China since the 18th CPC National Congress, vigorously

shows the roots of fine traditional Chinese culture, in a bid to build stronger cultural confidence.

The translation practice report is excerpted from *The Local Records of China: Dangtu Anhui*, which is the 327th of *The Local Records of China* and opened to the public on August 29th, 2019, with a total of 3255 words. The main content includes history, characters, ancient pagodas and culture of Dangtu County. The following are the main reasons for taking it as the translation material. First of all, the documentary *The Local Records of China: Dangtu Anhui* interprets local culture and has rich cultural connotations. With absorbing introduction and exquisite images, it fully shows the cultural heritage of Dangtu County and its cultural accumulation and historical inheritance contained therein, such as, the origin of the name “Dangtu”, the fate of Li Bai and Dangtu, *The Thousand Character Classic*. The subtitles of this documentary are beautiful, smooth and concise, including a large number of four-character words with strong cultural flavor. The research value is self-evident at both the cultural and linguistic levels. Furthermore, photographic image as a new attempt to record local records provides a rare opportunity for the update and dissemination of the county-level cities’ image<sup>[2]</sup>. The translator also intends to seize the opportunity to popularize her hometown’s culture and tell the story of hometown to the world.

Under the guidance of André Lefevere’s Manipulation Theory, the translator started the practice of C-E translation of the subtitles of *The Local Records of China: Dangtu Anhui (Excerpts)*. Through this translation practice, the translator aims to learn more about the characteristics and translation techniques of humanistic documentary subtitles, explore the influence of manipulation factors like ideology, patronage and poetics on the translator from the perspective of “translation is rewriting”, and hope to find the translation techniques that can be adapted to the subtitles of humanistic documentaries.

## 2. Theoretical basis

André Lefevere’s Manipulation Theory provides a new perspective for translation studies, which is of great significance for bridging cultural gaps and promoting intercultural communication. In this chapter, the translator introduced André Lefevere’s Manipulation Theory in detail, including the three elements of Manipulation Theory, and the significance of Manipulation Theory on subtitle translation.

### 2.1. Three elements of Manipulation Theory

André Lefevere<sup>[3]</sup> held in his book *Translation, Rewriting and the Manipulation of Literary Fame* that “translation is, of course, a rewriting of an original text. All rewritings, whatever their intention, reflect a certain ideology and a poetics and as such manipulate literature to function in a given society in a given way.” That is to say, rewriting largely determines the translation process, and ultimately shapes literary works in the target culture, or manipulates literature to play a certain role in the target society. Therefore, it is impossible to achieve complete equivalence in translation for the reason that translation is not only a conversion at the language level, but also a rewriting at the cultural level.

There are three factors, ideology, patronage and poetics, that interact and influence the translation process. Ideology not only refers to a series of concepts and theories that form the basis of economic or political theories, but also reflects the thinking characteristics of a certain group, social class or individual<sup>[4]</sup>. Nowadays, China is active in promoting traditional Chinese culture and presenting a positive image in front of the world. *The Local Records of China: Dangtu Anhui* is an epitome of the splendid civilization of China. In addition, André Lefevere<sup>[3]</sup> pointed out that

“patrons try to regulate the relationship between the literary system and the other systems, which, together, make up a society, a culture. As a rule they operate by means of institutions set up to regulate, if not the writing of literature, at least its distribution: academies, censorship bureaus, critical journals, and, by the far the most important, the educational establishment”. For *The Local Records of China: Dangtu Anhui*, there are quite a few patrons, such as, the State Administration of Radio, Film and Television (China), CCTV-10, event organizer and its directors. In terms of poetics, André Lefevere<sup>[3]</sup> argued that “a poetics can be said to consist of two components: one is an inventory of literary devices, genres, motifs, prototypical characters and situations, and symbols; the other a concept of what the role of literature is, or should be, in the social system as a whole.” For the purpose of spreading the culture smoothly, the translator manipulated some four-character words and rhetoric in *The Local Records of China: Dangtu Anhui*, so that the translation conforms to the pursuit of the mainstream poetics of the target language.

## 2.2. Significance of Manipulation Theory on subtitle translation

André Lefevere<sup>[3]</sup> claimed that “on every level of the translation process, it can be shown that, if linguistic considerations enter into conflict with considerations of an ideological and/or poetological nature, the latter tend to win out”. Therefore, when linguistics conflicts with ideology or poetology, the translator could adjust the original work to a certain extent so that the rewritten work is more in line with the mainstream ideology and poetics of the target language, which is accepted by as many readers as possible.

There are many characteristics of film and television subtitle translation, such as popularity, temporality, limitation of time and space, cross-cultural communication, colloquialization and popularization<sup>[5]</sup>. For the documentary *The Local Records of China: Dangtu Anhui*, its subtitles are beautiful, smooth and concise, including a large number of four-character words, culture-loaded words and proper nouns with strong cultural flavor. Translation is not only a conversion at the linguistic level, but also a rewriting at the cultural level. Therefore, the translator should attach more importance to cultural exchanges while taking into account the language characteristics of subtitle translation when translating.

Manipulation Theory is developed on the basis of Bassnett’s Cultural Translation Theory and other theories, which pay more attention to cultural translation. Moreover, Rewriting Theory is more systematic and plays a better theoretical guiding role in translation activities because it is developed on the basis of Polysystem Theory<sup>[6]</sup>. Therefore, Manipulation Theory has a good guidance for subtitle translation, especially for those documentaries with strong literary and strong cultural flavor.

## 3. Case analysis

The increasing development of society and the continuous advancement of science and technology make various forms of cross-cultural communication become more and more frequent, and it has become a trend in translation to shift from literal translation to rewriting based on the cultural level<sup>[7]</sup>. Therefore, the translator paid more attention to the cultural transmission of the translation when translating this text. In this section, case analysis is divided into two parts: adaptation under the manipulation of ideology and patronage and adaptation under the manipulation of poetics respectively.

### 3.1. Adaptation under the manipulation of ideology and patronage

André Lefevere<sup>[3]</sup> held in his book *Translation, Rewriting and the Manipulation of Literary Fame* that “ideology restricts and guides the creation of re-writers mainly from the aspects of politics, economy, and social status.” For *The Local Records of China: Dangtu Anhui*, there are many patrons and the major one is the State Administration of Radio, Film, and Television (China). In 2014, the State Administration of Radio, Film and Television issued a document saying that it is necessary to select excellent Chinese film and television dubbing works, so that Chinese culture can go out and strengthen international cultural exchanges<sup>[8]</sup>. After that, Xi Jinping<sup>[9]</sup> pointed out at the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China that “culture is a country and nation’s soul. Our country will thrive only if our culture thrives, and our nation will be strong only if our culture is strong.” In addition, he also indicated that “we will strengthen people-to-people and cultural exchanges with other countries, giving prominence to Chinese culture while also drawing on other cultures. We will improve our capacity for engaging in international communication so as to tell China’s stories well, present a true, multi-dimensional, and panoramic view of China, and enhance our country’s cultural soft power.” Therefore, the State Administration of Radio, Film, and Television (China) manipulates the ideology of the translated work to a moderate extent. The other patrons are CCTV-10, event organizers and its directors, etc.

#### 3.1.1. Transliteration

“The translation of publicity materials is quite important in letting target readers learn more about the source-language culture and then reaching the goal of promoting cultural communication, and Venuti’s foreignization is also calling for preserving the source-language cultural elements so as to introduce them to the world”<sup>[10]</sup>. Transliteration, as a translation technique in foreignization, can not be limited by the target language and text habits, and retain the cultural color in the original language. Although sometimes it may be difficult for target readers to understand, it can make them experience the “exotic” culture. The documentary *The Local Records of China: Dangtu Anhui (Excerpts)* contains many cultural factors, such as historical figures, antiquities, etc., involving many culture-specific words. Transliteration is conducive to spreading our national culture and conforming to the readers’ psychology of seeking something new.

In addition, subtitles display on the screen synchronously with the pictures of the documentary, the voices of characters and the background music, which provides excellent conditions for the transliteration of subtitles. Therefore, the transliteration of subtitles will not affect the target audience’s appreciation to a large extent, but will be conducive to the audience’s understanding of new cultures and stimulate their curiosity to enjoy foreign cultures. Foreignization can also help the audience to understand some linguistic phenomena that are closely related to the history, regional style, customs, and even brand-new expressions of the source culture in the film<sup>[11]</sup>.

Example 1

~~江南贡院，明清时期中国规模最大的科举考场。~~

Figure 1: Source text 1.

Target text 1: The Jiangnan Gongyuan used to be the largest imperial examination venue during the Ming and Qing dynasties.

In the figure 1, “The Jiangnan Gongyuan” is the largest imperial examination venue during the Ming and Qing dynasties. The present Jiangnan Gongyuan is also a famous scenic spot in Nanjing and a representative of the Chinese imperial examination system. Foreign readers and tourists are

often very interested in it. According to the André Lefevere's Manipulation Theory, patronage plays an important role in the process of translation. Patronage can influence translation activities from three aspects: ideology, economic interests and power status<sup>[12]</sup>. In this report, there are quite a few patrons, such as the State Administration of Radio, Film and Television (China), CCTV, event organizers and its directors. These patrons decides the goal of the translation is to spread the traditional Chinese culture, and imperial examination system is a very important part of Chinese culture and has had an indelible impact on the development of ancient Chinese politics, culture and education, so the translator used transliteration, hoping to make target readers learn more about Chinese history and culture and be attracted to the tourist attraction. Moreover, adopting transliteration is also convenient for readers to remember the name of the scenic spot.

### 3.1.2. Annotation

There are quite a few differences between English and Chinese cultures, so some culture-loaded words in Chinese have no equivalent in English at all, which results in a vacancy in word meaning. In 1990, André Lefevere and Susan Bassnett<sup>[13]</sup> pointed out that translation is not a pure linguistic activity, and it is deeply rooted in culture. Annotation can often be used to supplement a lot of background material, the origin of words, and other relevant information to facilitate the reader's understanding. Translation plays a key role in cultural exchanges. Retaining the cultural information of the source language can not only faithfully convey the cultural information of the source language, but also promote the cultural exchange between nations. Thus literal translation or transliteration plus annotation is the best method to keep the cultural information of the source language<sup>[14]</sup>.

Example 2

~~然而官场不是诗坛，落寞地离开长安，是早已注定的结局。~~

Figure 2: Source text 2.

Target text 2: However, the official circle is not the poetry world. It is Li Bai's destiny to leave Chang'an (give up politics).

In the source text 2 of figure 2, annotation was adopted here. As the capital of Tang Dynasty, "Chang'an" is the political and cultural centers of China. In this sentence, the underlined phrase is a pun, which refers not only to Li Bai's departure from Chang'an, but also to Li Bai's giving up to engage in the political circle. "Chang'an" is the embodiment of imperial power and aristocratic power, and is regarded as China's cultural capital. If the translator just translated this culture-loaded word literally, the target language readers would not be able to understand its meaning. The target language readers who are not familiar with ancient Chinese culture may even have doubts about this sentence. Firstly, a large amount of cultural information would be lost, and on the other hand, the consistency of the responses of the source language readers and the target language readers cannot be achieved. Therefore, while translating this underlined phrase, the translator should not only focus on the conversion of the two languages, but also consider historical and cultural factors, so as to spread cultural capital and enhance cultural interaction effectively. According to the Manipulation Theory, ideology reflects the thinking characteristics of a certain group, social class or individual and manipulates the creation of re-writers. Therefore, under the manipulation of ideology, the translator used annotation to supplement and explained the reasons for Li Bai's departure to fill the information gap between the target readers and the original text, so as to promote cultural exchanges.

### 3.2. Adaptation under the manipulation of poetics

Poetics is an important part of the cultural system in which the rewriter works and a form of literary means such as register, theme, archetype, and context<sup>[8]</sup>. This concept is essential for the choice of themes, and the choice of themes for literary works must be linked to social institutions in order to be more popular.

It is known that there are some differences between Chinese and English. In order to make the documentary's introduction known to the audience in the target countries, the translator's choice of words and sentences is very important<sup>[8]</sup>. Therefore, adaptation under the manipulation of poetics was divided into two parts: translation at lexical level and translation at syntactic level.

#### 3.2.1. Translation at lexical level

Chinese subtitle often includes some four-character words and parallel structure, while English tends to use concise words. Thus, literal translation and substitution may work a lot.

##### Example 3

在笔锋行走之间，中华文化的灵韵渗透到人们的思维里，楷书之方正，行书之灵动，草书之飘逸，无声地塑造了书者的性格和气质。

Figure 3: Source text 3.

Target text 3: The charm of Chinese culture penetrates into people's thinking through calligraphy. Upright and foursquare regular script, flowing and graceful running script, and unstrained and bold cursive script shape the character and temperament of the writer.

In the figure 3, the three underlined phrases with the characteristics of parallel structure describe the features of different types of calligraphy. Calligraphy is an artistic expression of the beauty of writing unique to China. As per the Manipulation Theory, translators will be influenced by poetics in the process of translation. The difference in thinking is reflected in all aspects of language expression. Chinese is accustomed to use parallel rhetoric and a large number of four-character words with strong cultural flavor to enhance the expressive effect and make sentences more smooth and gorgeous. For the purpose of translation is to preserve the beauty of Chinese characters and spread Chinese culture and poetic aesthetics, the translator used literal translation and attributive structure to retain the essence of the original text, such as the parallel form. In this way, the translation not only retains the literary characteristics of Chinese, but also makes it easier for the target language readers to accept it and experience Chinese poetic aesthetics deeply.

##### Example 4

安徽当涂，是“山水都”，更是“逍遥津”。

Figure 4: Source text 4.

Target text 4: Dangtu, Anhui, is the “Wonderland” and even more of “California”.

In the source text 4 of figure 4, the two underlined words are used to describe the beautiful scenery of Dangtu and the peaceful life of people. They are all three-character words, which are full of literary flavor. Under the manipulation of poetics, the translation should conform to the mainstream literary form of the target language. Therefore, the translator looked for the similar image in the English expression that can be accepted by the reader. Substitution was adopted here. “Wonderland” refers to an imaginary place in children's stories while “California” stands for a paradise, a place of peace and tranquility. The translator chose these words that are more familiar to westerners to translate so as to follow the western poetics habits and narrow the cultural differences.

#### 3.2.2. Translation at syntactic level



There are quite a few different cultural concepts and ways of thinking between China and the West. For example, Chinese culture focuses on “inaction” “savvy” and “the whole” while western culture focuses on “action” “rationality” and “the individual”<sup>[15]</sup>. The differences in thinking between China and the West have created differences in the form of language expression. In terms of language, Chinese emphasizes parataxis, vocabulary is rich in meaning, and sentence structure is loose, while western language emphasizes hypotaxis, and sentence structure is strict and complete in form<sup>[16]</sup>. To resolve these differences between China and the West, voice shifting and information restructuring may be a good way.

#### Example 5

朱元璋的部下大将花云与陈友谅的军队在此激战，最后，花云战死沙场，他的英勇与忠诚广为流传，并改编为京剧传唱至今。

Figure 5: Source text 5.

Target text 5: Zhu Yuanzhang’s subordinate general Hua Yun and Chen Youliang’s army fought fiercely here. In the end, Hua Yun died in the battle but his heroism and loyalty were widely circulated and his story were adapted into Peking Opera and were still widely sung.

Chinese focuses on parataxis and the active voice while western puts the emphasis on hypotaxis and the passive voice. As per the requirements of Manipulation Theory, the translator should rewrite the structure and content of the original text according to the demand of poetics of English in the process of translation. In the source text 5 of figure 5, heroism and loyalty are inanimate nouns and should be passed on, be adapted into Peking Opera and be widely sung by the animate from the perspective of westerner. Consequently, with purpose of meeting the western poetic habits and making the target readers easier to understand the meaning of this sentence, the translator adjusted the sentence by changing the sentence voice under the manipulation of poetics.

#### Example 6

他们长期受儒家经典的熏陶，恪守儒家所提倡的“尊德性，道问学”“内圣外王”为学之道，胸怀“治国、平天下”的抱负，追求“天下大同”的理想，肩负着齐家治国平天下的重任。

Figure 6: Source text 6.

Target text 6: They has long been influenced by the Confucian classics, abiding the Confucian ideals of “respecting the morals, learning and asking questions” “sagely within and kingly without”. They pursued the dream of “supreme harmony worldwide” and shouldered the responsibility of regulating the home, managing the country and perfecting the world.

In the figure 6, the two underlined phrases are repeated, and both express the meaning of shouldering the responsibility of regulating the home, managing the country and perfecting the world. According to the Manipulation Theory, poetics mainly expounds the form in which literature should be presented to serve the dominant ideology<sup>[17]</sup>. The mainstream poetic habit in English tends to be more concise and straight-forward. Therefore, under the manipulation of poetics, the translator considered the relationship of sentences, used information restructuring to combine sentences with similar meanings and expressed the complex information in a simpler way, which not only avoids the redundant burden of the translation, but also conforms to the concise characteristics of subtitle translation and the logical sequence and expression habits of English. Meanwhile, the translator dedicated to maintain the equivalence of sentence patterns, reflecting the beauty of phonology.

## 4. Conclusions

This report focuses on the application of André Lefevere’s Manipulation Theory in the C-E

subtitle translation of the documentary *The Local Records of China: Dangtu Anhui (Excerpts)*. Taking it as the translation material, the translator learned more about the characteristics and translation techniques of humanistic documentary subtitles, exploring the influence of manipulation factors like ideology, patronage and poetics on the translator from the perspective of “translation is rewriting”, finding the translation techniques that can be adapted to the subtitles of humanistic documentaries. In the process of translating *The Local Records of China: Dangtu Anhui (Excerpts)*, the translator realized that the manipulation factor has a great influence on translation. Among them, ideology and patronage manipulate the goals of the translation, and poetics manipulates the techniques adopted by the translation to achieve the goals. André Lefevere’s Manipulation Theory provides a new perspective for translation studies, which is of great significance for translating various cultural differences and for cross-cultural communication. It also contributes to the smooth and effective translation, the dissemination of Chinese culture in a multicultural context and the writing of Chinese stories. In conclusion, under the manipulation of ideology and patronage, transliteration and annotation are effective in dealing with some culture-loaded words and proper nouns. Transliteration is beneficial to cultural exportation and adding the cultural background is conducive to target readers’ better understanding of traditional Chinese culture. Both of them all present a true, multi-dimensional and panoramic view of China. While under the manipulation of poetics, literal translation, substitution, voice shifting and information restructuring play an important role in the process of translation so as to satisfy the poetic habits of the west.

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