

Cultural Reflections of Translating Huidong Fishing Songs on Global Perceptions of Southern China

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Abstract: This essay discusses the translation of Huidong fishing songs, an integral part of China's Intangible Cultural Heritage from Guangdong Province, through the lens of cultural translation theory. It underscores the role of translation in enhancing global understanding and appreciation of Southern China's cultural identity. Emphasizing the translator's role as a cultural mediator, the paper explores strategies for culturally sensitive translation, including cultural contextualization and adaptation. This approach ensures that translations resonate authentically with global audiences while preserving the songs' cultural essence. The paper highlights translation as a crucial tool for cultural preservation and intercultural communication, fostering empathy and respect across cultural boundaries. It concludes by affirming the significance of translating Huidong fishing songs in bridging cultural divides and enriching global cultural dialogue.

1. Introduction

Indigenous art forms in a region represent its unique cultural landscapes and offer a way for the outside world to understand and appreciate these areas. One such example is the Huidong fishing songs (Yuge) of Guangdong Province, which were officially recognized as part of China's National List of Intangible Cultural Heritage in 2008. These songs reflect the local community's life and serve as a bridge to share the cultural richness of the coastal locale with a global audience. Originally used for solace and entertainment, these songs now facilitate cultural dialogue. Translation plays a vital role in connecting diverse cultures and allowing them to appreciate each other's heritage in our increasingly interconnected world. However, while the artistic features and rhyme of these songs have been examined, their translation has received less attention. This paper aims to explore how the translation of Huidong fishing songs, guided by Cultural Translation theory, can facilitate a deeper global understanding of Southern China's culture and identity.

This article will adopt a reflective approach to discuss the role of translation in the process of cultural dissemination. Instead of relying on empirical data, it will offer an in-depth analysis of the construction of cultural images and identities of Huidong fishing songs, and the impact of translation of international perceptions of Southern China. We then argue to utilize cultural translation theory to translate such songs for fostering mutual cultural understanding. Furthermore,

the paper discusses the translators' role, and explores the various strategies that might be employed in cultural translation practices, as well as how these strategies can serve as bridges for dialogue, enabling deeper understanding and respect among people from diverse cultural backgrounds. We aim to illustrate the potential significance of translation as an essential tool for cultural exchange, and its capacity to connect disparate cultures and promote cultural affinity in a globalized context.

2. Construction of Image and cultural identity of Southern China through Huidong fishing songs

The Huidong fishing songs, originating from a quaint fishing region in Guangdong Province, Southern China, significantly contribute to the image and cultural identity of the area. These songs, deeply rooted in the unique environment, life experiences, and values of the local community, offer a vivid portrayal of Southern China's coastal heritage. At the heart of these songs lies a reflection of daily life and labor. The lyrics and rhythm are often inspired by the routines and labor-intensive activities of fishing, embodying the deep connection between the people and the sea. This connection is not just physical but also rhythmic, mirroring the natural ebb and flow that is so integral to life in the coastal regions of Southern China.

Furthermore, Huidong fishing songs serve as a bastion for preserving local dialects, embedding linguistic features characteristic of Southern China. This not only maintains linguistic diversity but also enriches the region's cultural identity, providing a voice to its unique vernacular heritage. The songs are also repositories of traditional knowledge, encapsulating age-old wisdom about fishing techniques, marine ecology, navigation, weather patterns, and tidal information. This passing down of knowledge is vital for maintaining the region's cultural heritage and practices that are deeply intertwined with the sea. In addition to being a source of knowledge, Huidong fishing songs are aural vessels of history and folklore. They often incorporate historic events, legends, and mythological tales, thereby serving as a living history book that bolsters the cultural identity of the region by narrating stories that are definitive of the local community.

The emotional landscape of these songs is as varied as the life they depict, ranging from joy and celebration to melancholy and longing. This emotional diversity paints a picture of the Southern Chinese people as resilient, industrious, and deeply connected to their environment, reflecting the multifaceted nature of their inner lives. For instance, the traditional songs including *Marrying the Bride*, and *Fishermen's Four Seasons* mostly reflects the real-life state of fishermen's life at sea, customs, and fishery production, as well as express the fishermen's deep feelings towards the ocean and their attitude towards life. Artistically, these songs add a rich layer to China's diverse artistic expressions. The unique melodies, intonations, and performance styles of Huidong fishing songs are not just musical expressions but are also emblematic of the broader cultural fabric of the South. The communal aspect of these songs cannot be overstated. Sung collectively during festivals, gatherings, or fishing activities, they foster a sense of community and shared identity. This communal singing reinforces social bonds and celebrates the shared cultural roots of the people. Over time, these songs have transcended their musical origins to become cultural symbols, emblematic of Southern China's coastal heritage. Recognized both within and outside China, they have become a symbol of the region, reflecting not just the past but also shaping contemporary perceptions of the area's rich seafaring tradition.

3. Potential impacts of translating Huidong fishing songs

The English translation of Huidong fishing songs has a multifaceted impact on cultural perceptions and identities, both within Southern China and globally. These translations not only preserve and disseminate the unique cultural heritage of the Huidong region but also reshape how

foreign audiences perceive and connect with this part of China.

Firstly, translating Huidong fishing songs into English can increase cultural awareness and appreciation. It makes these culturally rich songs accessible to a broader audience, fostering a greater appreciation of the Huidong region's unique cultural aspects. For international audiences, these translations provide a window into the lives, traditions, and values of the Huidong fishing communities, thus enhancing understanding of Chinese cultural diversity. Moreover, translation plays a crucial role in the preservation and continuity of tradition. By documenting these songs, translation ensures their stories and the heritage they represent are passed down to future generations. This is especially important if the local language and traditions are at risk of fading away. Translations can also bridge generational gaps, connecting younger generations, who may not be fluent in the local dialects, with the older generations for whom these songs are a cultural staple.

The impact of translation on identity and community cohesion is profound^[1]. For the Huidong community, these songs are a source of identity, and their global recognition through translation can enhance community pride and reinforce their cultural identity. This process can also strengthen community bonds, as locals unite in sharing their heritage with the world. However, translation can also alter cultural narratives. The risk of losing nuanced cultural elements or introducing interpretive layers reflective of the translator's perspective is significant. Misinterpretations in the translated version might lead to cultural misunderstandings or oversimplifications, failing to fully capture the original essence. The social implications of translating these songs are notable as well. They can foster cross-cultural dialogues and respect, and an increased interest in Huidong's culture could spur cultural tourism, impacting local economies and social dynamics. Finally, the subtle cumulative effects of these translations are noteworthy. Over time, they might become the primary means through which outsiders understand Huidong's culture, shaping external narratives about the community. The recognition and potential commercialization of these songs could impact local cultural practices, leading to a cultural revival or a shift in focus towards external tastes.

4. Applying cultural translation theory to translate Huidong fishing songs

Applying cultural translation theory to the translation of Huidong fishing songs provides a comprehensive approach to understanding and conveying their rich cultural essence in a global context. This theory emphasizes the need to transcend mere linguistic translation, focusing instead on the deeper cultural meanings and traditions embedded in these songs.

Cultural translation theory advocates for a nuanced translation approach that involves more than just converting words from one language to another. It highlights the importance of translating cultural symbols, narratives, and practices inherent in the Huidong fishing songs. This approach requires a deep understanding of the original cultural context and the ability to effectively communicate this context to a global audience. The theory underlines the necessity of "transplantation", a process where specific cultural elements are integrated and embedded within a different cultural setting. This ensures that the translation not only communicates the literal meaning of the songs but also preserves their cultural significance.

A key aspect of this theory in the context of translating Huidong fishing songs is localization. This involves adapting the songs to new cultural contexts in a way that maintains their relevance and resonance. Localization goes beyond mere linguistic adjustments; it includes cultural adaptations that consider local customs, norms, and behaviors. This ensures that the translated content is culturally congruent and sensitive to the audience's cultural background. Moreover, Cultural translation theory stresses the importance of maintaining the integrity of the original cultural content. This is crucial to avoid misinterpretation or oversimplification of the Huidong fishing songs. By preserving the cultural authenticity of these songs, they can be represented respectfully and authentically on a global stage. However, this process faces challenges, including the potential loss or distortion of original meanings, risks of cultural appropriation, and the dominance of major languages and cultures^[2]. These challenges necessitate careful, respectful, and

informed translation practices that honor the original cultural context of the Huidong fishing songs while making them accessible and relevant to a global audience.

5. Reflections on translating Huidong fishing songs

Huidong fishing songs are treasures of cultural expression, and when translating them, both the role of the translator and translation strategies are crucial. Therefore, translator's responsibilities and the importance of their cultural and linguistic expertise will be considered, followed by the specific strategies used to ensure an accurate and resonant translation of these enchanting songs.

5.1. The translator's role

Translators, within the framework of Cultural Translation Theory, assume a role far beyond that of mere language experts; they act as cultural mediators, a concept highlighted by scholars^[3]. In the context of translating Huidong fishing songs, their responsibilities extend to a deeper process of cultural transplantation. This involves not only the linguistic rendition of the songs but also the sensitive adaptation and integration of the unique cultural elements, traditions, and nuances from the Huidong community into a different cultural context. This demanding role necessitates a profound understanding of both the source and target cultures. Translators should navigate these cultural landscapes with finesse, acting as bridges that connect disparate cultural experiences and perceptions. Their work is not just about conveying words but also about transporting the essence of one culture into the heart of another.

In the endeavor to translate Huidong fishing songs, translators should engage in a delicate balance of preserving the cultural identity of the source community while making the content relatable and meaningful to the target audience. This process is central to cultural translation theory, emphasizing the importance of cultural congruence and sensitivity. The translators' role extends beyond mere conversion of text; they are responsible for maintaining the cultural integrity of the original songs and ensuring that the translations resonate with the target audience's cultural context. Localization is a key aspect of this process. It involves making cultural adjustments to the translated content, ensuring that the translations not only communicate the literal meaning but also capture the cultural spirit and emotional depth of the Huidong fishing community. This task requires translators to carefully navigate the nuances of both the source and target cultures, ensuring that the translations are both authentic and accessible. Additionally, translators have an ethical responsibility to balance fidelity to the source material with the accessibility of the songs to the target audience. This complex balancing act, as highlighted by Kramsch & Zhu^[4], involves a nuanced understanding of both linguistic and cultural aspects, ensuring that the translations do justice to the original while still engaging the target audience effectively.

5.2. Translation strategies

Reflecting on the translation strategies for Huidong Fishing songs within the framework of cultural translation theory underscores the importance of a nuanced, respectful, and culturally informed approach. This complex process transcends mere linguistic proficiency, demanding a profound understanding of the songs' cultural context and the capacity to adapt their content for a global audience while preserving their local authenticity and cultural essence.

Central to this approach under cultural translation theory is the concept of cultural contextualization and adaptation. Translators need to immerse themselves deeply in the Huidong community's traditions, practices, and values to accurately capture the essence of these songs. This task requires translators to go beyond the surface level of language, exploring and conveying the underlying cultural nuances and subtleties. Such a strategy involves a careful balance between literal and conceptual translation, ensuring the integrity of the original lyrics while allowing creative

liberty to convey the same thematic essence and emotional impact in another language. A critical aspect of this approach is the preservation of local authenticity when addressing a global audience. The translations should be accessible and engaging to people unfamiliar with Huidong culture while retaining the unique cultural elements that give these songs their distinctive character. This balance is crucial to avoid stereotypes and generalizations, ensuring that the songs do not inadvertently reinforce cultural biases or misconceptions ^[5]. The translation process should ideally be iterative and collaborative. Continuous refinement and feedback, particularly involving input from native speakers and cultural experts, can provide invaluable insights. Such collaboration helps ensure that the translations accurately reflect and honor the source material, thereby maintaining cultural integrity.

6. Conclusions

In conclusion, guided by cultural translation theory, translating Huidong fishing songs is not just a process of linguistic conversion, but a deep dive into cultural exchange. These songs, which vividly showcase the daily life and rich heritage of the Huidong community, act as a medium to convey the intricate cultural identity of Southern China. This translation task requires translators to go beyond linguistic accuracy, emphasizing cultural sensitivity and respect. It involves preserving the essence and cultural identity of Huidong, while making it accessible and understandable to a global audience. Strategies such as cultural contextualization, adaptation, and empathy are key to achieving a genuine and meaningful cultural dialogue.

Therefore, translating Huidong fishing songs contributes to a deeper global understanding and appreciation of Southern China's culture. It also serves as an important act of cultural preservation, strengthening the ties within the Huidong community and the global cultural heritage. In summary, the translation of Huidong fishing songs demonstrates the powerful role of cultural translation in bridging cultural divides, fostering global respect, and empathy through sensitive and understanding translation.

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