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Representing Hani Living Heritage through Documentary Subtitles: Local Culture and Cross-Cultural Mediation

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Abstract:
Documentary subtitles present local cultural life in another language. They translate cultural names, images, and the relations and evaluations linked with them. This study looks at ecological, heritage, and governance meanings in two documentaries about the Hani rice terraces. It compares 106 coded meaning units, including 81 extralinguistic cultural references (ECRs) and 25 linguistically embedded cultural expressions (LCEs). Film 1 mainly deals with ecological knowledge, relations in the terraced landscape, and figurative descriptions of interdependence. Film 2 pays more attention to community institutions, heritage and administrative identities, and resource governance. Direct translation was most common in Film 1 and was also the largest ECR strategy in Film 2; official equivalents, generalisation, and specification were also common in Film 2. All LCEs in Film 1 were translated literally, and this method was used for most LCEs in Film 2, while paraphrase ranked second in Film 2. Preservation was the most common meaning label in both films and at both analytical levels. Some subtitles, however, were easier to understand but less institutionally specific, and some changed the evaluation or the relations between actors. Read alongside the films' contrasting production and circulation contexts, these patterns show that subtitling mediates living heritage by selecting how ecological connections, heritage value, and governance relations become explicit in English. The study therefore distinguishes translation operation from meaning outcome and provides a traceable account of local cultural representation across languages.

Keywords:
Documentary subtitling, Local cultural representation, Hani rice terraces, Living heritage, Cross-cultural mediation

1.Introduction

Documentaries about living heritage present ways of inhabiting a landscape, managing shared resources, and recognising cultural value. When these accounts acquire English subtitles, their cultural meanings also acquire new verbal forms. The Hani rice terraces offer a particularly instructive setting for examining that process. Jiao et al. describe ecological knowledge through the management of water, forests, and soil and the

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spatial relationships sustaining terraced agriculture.[1] Such knowledge concerns connections between practices and places, rather than a collection of isolated environmental terms. Institutional descriptions also give this landscape international visibility. UNESCO inscribed the Cultural Landscape of Honghe Hani Rice Terraces on the World Heritage List in 2013.[2] FAO identifies the Hani Rice Terraces as a Globally Important Agricultural Heritage System, with recognition dating from 2010.[3] These are distinct heritage frameworks, with their own descriptions and geographical scopes. Alongside ecological relations, the terms through which recognition is expressed become part of the landscape's cultural representation. An English account therefore needs to state the names involved and also explain the relations among people, resources, and forms of recognition.

Subtitles help make selected speech and narration available to viewers in another language. A subtitle may keep a local name, explain a practice, or express a landscape image in a different way; each choice affects what is directly stated in the translated account. Xiong and Li locate ethnographic film within traditions of meaning construction involving relationships between filmmakers, represented subjects, images, and texts.[4] Henley's discussion of ethnographic subtitling likewise treats translation as an editorial practice integrated with filmmaking, including decisions about speech, expression, and timing.[5] The subtitle is consequently a site where cultural presentation can be examined closely, rather than a transparent supplement to an otherwise complete representation. Díaz Cintas and Remael situate subtitling within an audiovisual environment in which written language operates alongside sound and image.[6] In this study, this means looking closely at what the English wording adds to the film. For example, describing a village collective by location is not the same as describing it through ownership, because the relation stated in the subtitle changes. In the same way, a figurative crown and an explicit heritage title give different forms to the evaluation in the narration.

Research on Chinese-English subtitling has already discussed the translation of cultural content. Chai et al. study the strategies and difficulties found in the subtitles of a documentary about paper cutting, and they connect specific cultural items with the choices made in translation. [7] Sun identifies a neutralising tendency in English subtitles across Chinese films, showing how culturally marked expressions can lose specificity through different operations. [8] Lu and Zhu compare two English subtitle versions of Farewell My Concubine from an international communication perspective, examining the treatment of cultural meanings. [9] These studies establish useful categories and recurring translation tendencies. For the present inquiry, however, a further analytical task remains: determining whether a retained cultural referent also retains the institutional qualification, evaluation, or actor relation through which it becomes meaningful in a documentary account. The present study addresses this task through ecological, heritage, and governance meanings in two Hani-terrace documentaries. Pedersen's framework for extralinguistic cultural references (ECRs) identifies culturally situated referents and their principal translation operations. [10] A separate layer of linguistically embedded cultural expressions (LCEs) covers meanings carried by metaphors, sayings, and reflexive narration. Connecting both layers to explicit meaning judgements makes it possible to distinguish the recognisability of a cultural item from the preservation of the relationships and evaluations expressed around it.

This study examines how English subtitles represent local cultural life in two documentaries made through research and filmmaking in Baohua Town, Honghe County, Yunnan. The films share a regional focus but differ in length, thematic emphasis, language pathways, and the stage at which English entered their circu-

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lation. One film presents ecological resilience in a short multilingual production, while the other is a longer Chinese-language documentary about water, heritage, and governance that later received English subtitles. The comparison starts with the cultural content shown in the films, then considers how the English subtitles express it and what relations they present. The analysis is guided by four research questions:

RQ1. Which parts of local cultural life appear as extralinguistic cultural references (ECRs) and linguistically embedded cultural expressions (LCEs) in the two documentaries, and how are their distributions different?

RQ2. What ECR translation strategies and LCE reformulation methods are used in the English subtitles to translate these cultural references and expressions?

RQ3. In what ways are ecological, heritage, and governance meanings preserved, made easier to understand, neutralised, or reframed, and where do ambiguity and information loss appear?

RQ4. What can the similarities and differences between the two films show about subtitles as cross-cultural mediation when the films have different production contexts?

The analysis uses descriptive coding together with close comparison of the Chinese source texts and the English subtitles actually used in the films. The cultural categories show what is represented; the strategies and reformulation methods show how it is translated, and the meaning labels and cases indicate what is kept or changed. In this order, translation analysis is used to answer a cultural communication question about how English subtitles convey the local relations and evaluations found in the narration of living heritage. It also tests the central distinction developed in this article: retaining a cultural name or image does not by itself establish that its institutional qualification, evaluative force, or actor relation has been retained.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Documentary subtitles as cultural representation and mediation

Documentary representation involves decisions about how cultural life becomes available as an account. Xiong and Li examine ethnographic film through presentational traditions that connect images, textual interpretation, and the communication of anthropological knowledge.[4] Their discussion challenges the assumption that recording visible events is sufficient to communicate their meaning. Filmmakers work through particular relationships with the people represented and through conventions that shape what a film makes intelligible. From this perspective, language belongs within the construction of the documentary account. An English subtitle helps articulate what an activity is called, how a speaker evaluates it, and which relationships a narrative attributes to those involved.

Henley approaches this issue through the practice of subtitling ethnographic films.[5] His account treats subtitles as an editorial responsibility, requiring attention to the expression of speech as well as to timing and presentation. Subtitling can preserve access to participants' voices while making verbal content available in another language. However, the English text is still composed through decisions about wording, organisation, and emphasis. This makes it useful to distinguish the presence of a speaking subject from the particular proposition supplied on that subject's behalf. In cultural representation, a translated institutional label and a trans-

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lated judgement about an institution perform different tasks. The first identifies a referent; the second conveys a position or evaluation. Both contribute to the account offered by the film.

The audiovisual setting is also part of these language choices. Díaz Cintas and Remael describe subtitling as translation in which written words appear together with other verbal and non-verbal material in the programme.[6] Viewers read a subtitle while also hearing speech and sound and seeing images; the subtitle is not an independent written text. Comparing the source and the subtitle therefore helps to show what the English wording contributes, while the other modes remain separate sources of meaning. In this study, cross-cultural meaning mediation refers to the way cultural content is arranged across languages through naming, explanation, changes in rhetoric, and the expression of relations. The analysis looks at observable wording, including what is made explicit, what keeps a particular form, and how a relation or evaluation is restated. Mediation does not only occur through omission or obvious substitution; a small change in a verb, modifier, or relative clause may also change what is said about a familiar referent. For this reason, the analysis focuses on the link between cultural content and its English wording in the documentary where it appears.

2.2 Living heritage, local knowledge and institutional representation

Living heritage brings together ongoing practice and the ways that practice is recognised and represented. Smith treats heritage as a cultural process involving meaning, identity, and the authority to define value.[11] This approach broadens attention beyond the physical persistence of a site or object. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett examines heritage as metacultural production, emphasising the processes through which cultural practices and their bearers become objects of heritage attention.[12] Read together, these perspectives distinguish cultural life from the representational and institutional acts that identify it as heritage. For documentary analysis, that distinction makes both everyday practice and the vocabulary of recognition relevant objects of inquiry.

Research on the Hani terraces gives this relationship concrete ecological and social dimensions. Jiao et al. connect indigenous ecological knowledge with resource management and the organisation of a cultural landscape.[1] Forests, water, settlements, and agricultural practices acquire significance through their relationships within that landscape. Luo similarly examines the circulation of water, cooperative labour, and shared management as connections between ecological processes and social life.[13] These accounts support treating local knowledge as more than a stock of technical names. Describing an allocation device without its function, or listing landscape elements without their relationship, can leave an important part of the cultural account unstated. This is the contextual reason for examining relational meaning in the subtitles.

Institutional representation adds another part to the discussion. Wu and Sun study cultural governance in the World Heritage setting of the Hani terraces and relate government and tourism activities to the everyday practices and resistance of villagers.[14] Their study shows that governing actors and residents both take part in forming heritage space. It also helps separate the official designation of a landscape from the social relations through which people use and govern it. Ecological, heritage, and governance meanings may appear in the same documentary passage, but they are not the same kind of meaning. Subtitle analysis therefore needs to look at the institutional status being named, the local practice being described, and the roles given to community actors. These points are used here to understand specific Chinese–English expressions; regional heritage theory is not treated as a replacement for evidence from the text.

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2.3 ECRs and LCEs as analytical entry points

Pedersen's account of ECRs provides a framework for examining expressions that refer to culturally situated entities outside language itself.[10] Recognition depends on cultural knowledge as well as linguistic competence. This makes the framework useful for references to places, institutions, practices, or other named elements of local life. Its strategy repertoire distinguishes retention, specification, direct translation, generalisation, substitution, omission, and official equivalent. These categories describe how a reference is handled in translation. An official equivalent, for example, identifies a conventional correspondence; it does not by itself establish the completeness of the cultural account surrounding that name.

A referential framework does not encompass every way that cultural meaning enters documentary language. Metaphors, proverbial formulations, allusions, and reflexive narration can derive their significance from expression rather than from an external named object. This study therefore uses LCE as an operational label for linguistically embedded cultural expressions. This difference concerns both what the expression refers to and the way its wording presents meaning. A landscape reference and a metaphor of interweaving may appear in the same subtitle, but they provide different kinds of evidence.

The two entry points are linked when meaning is interpreted. The primary strategy for an ECR records the main translation operation, while the reformulation method for an LCE records what happens to its expressive form. These labels do not automatically show which cultural features are kept or changed. A separate meaning label is therefore used for particular propositions, referents, images, and relations. This separation is important when a subtitle becomes more explicit but also less specific, or when it changes a relation between actors. In this way, the framework follows cultural content, its translation, and its meaning. At the same time, it keeps borrowed translation concepts separate from the categories developed for this corpus.

2.4 Cultural representation in existing subtitling studies

Existing studies of Chinese cultural content connect subtitle choices with representation in several ways. Chai et al.'s analysis of The Life of Paper-cutting examines the strategies and challenges involved in producing English subtitles for a cultural documentary.[7] Their findings identify omission, direct transfer, equivalence, and adaptation among the relevant treatments, alongside technical, cultural, and linguistic challenges. The study offers a close genre comparison because its cultural objects are situated within documentary narration. The shared interest lies in connecting concrete expressions with the decisions through which cultural practice is presented in English.

Sun shifts attention towards a recurring tendency across Chinese films.[8] The analysis examines culturally specific references involving customs, local arts, slang, and humour, identifying neutralisation through several translation operations. Its significance for the present study is the separation between an operation and the weakening of particular cultural features. Explicitation, for instance, can give an expression a clearer English formulation while altering the culturally marked form through which it was expressed. Neutralisation consequently concerns an aspect of represented meaning, rather than a synonym for any single strategy. Here, it provides a point of comparison for interpreting specificity and rhetorical force alongside other retained or changed features.

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Lu and Zhu's comparison of two English subtitle versions of Farewell My Concubine foregrounds the communication of cultural meanings through alternative renderings.[9] By examining the treatment of cultural elements within a film's verbal and audiovisual context, they link translation differences with the account made available in English. Their work also shows the value of comparison at the level of actual expressions: different formulations can retain different aspects of the same cultural content. The present study adopts that attention to textual differences while keeping its own ECR/LCE distinction and meaning judgements explicit.

Together, these studies support analysing cultural representation through specific subtitle choices, but they do not supply one interchangeable model. Documentary translation practice, a cross-film neutralising tendency, and comparison between subtitle versions each answer a different question. The present inquiry brings their concerns into a bounded comparison of two Hani-terrace productions. Its emphasis is on how naming and rhetorical treatment relate to ecological connections, heritage evaluations, and community actors' resource relations. Descriptive patterns establish where particular operations occur; paired textual evidence explains their cultural significance; production records locate the resulting accounts within the films' language pathways and circulation histories.

3. Case and Production Context

The two documentaries arose from filmmaking in Baohua Town, Honghe County, Yunnan Province. They concern the wider Hani rice-terrace cultural landscape through different narrative emphases. This location is different from Yuanyang County, where most of the ecological research cited here and the UNESCO-listed property are located.[1][2] FAO describes the Hani agricultural heritage system as covering terraces in Honghe, Yuanyang, Lüchun, and Jinping counties.[3] The production pathways described below come from the project's filmmaking records.

Film 1, Living with Water: The Resilient Wisdom of the Hani Rice Terraces (《与水而生：哈尼梯田的韧性智慧》), is a 2025 short documentary running 3 minutes 58 seconds. It presents the terraces mainly through water, ecological connections, and continuing local practices. Hani is the main spoken language, but the English subtitles came from the original Chinese script. The Chinese script was translated separately into Hani for narration. The production used parallel Chinese-to-English and Chinese-to-Hani routes, rather than translating from Hani to Chinese and then into English. A local native speaker of Hani with master's-level training in anthropology provided the narration; the research account keeps this person's identity anonymous.

Film 1's English subtitles were included in the version used for an international competition. Let's Talk About Water lists the film as receiving an Honorable Mention in the Back to Our Future Short Film Competition.[15] This record establishes a particular circulation context for the English-subtitled version. The Chinese–English comparison concerns the script and subtitles prepared for that production, so the language heard in the finished film and the direct source of its English text have different roles in defining the case.

Film 2, Water and Power: Visual Anthropological Observations from the Honghe Hani Rice Terraces (《水与权——基于红河哈尼梯田的影视人类学观察》), runs for approximately 15 minutes 25 seconds. Its principal language is Chinese. The film develops an account of water, local institutions, property relations, and heritage recognition, alongside reflections on visual anthropological practice. According to the production re-

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cords, the version originally selected had Chinese subtitles only. English subtitles were added afterwards, and the present study concerns the revised version with burnt-in Chinese and English subtitles. The English text therefore belongs to a later stage of this film's production and circulation history.

The shared field setting allows the films to be read in relation to one another, while their different narrative materials specify what is being compared. Film 1 condenses ecological life into a short account with figurative narration. Film 2 contains more sustained discussion of institutions and resource relations. The researcher participated in filming, editing, English translation, and preparation of the research corpus. Production records consequently provide contextual knowledge from within these activities. In the analysis, participant statements, authorial narration, and subsequent interpretation retain their distinct attribution, and sensitive village or actor identities follow the project's anonymisation conventions.

4. Methodology

4.1 Research design and corpus construction

This study used a descriptive and interpretive comparison of two documentaries to examine how English subtitles represent local cultural life and mediate its meanings across languages. Henley's discussion of ethnographic subtitling informed attention to the relationship between subtitles and the film in which they appear,[5] while Xiong and Li's account of situated representation informed attention to the filmmaker's involvement in meaning construction.[4] The research questions and argument were refined iteratively as coding clarified the evidence available for comparison.

The corpus comprised the complete, manually prepared and checked Chinese–English subtitle sheets for Film 1, Living with Water: The Resilient Wisdom of the Hani Rice Terraces, and Film 2, Water and Power: Visual Anthropological Observations from the Honghe Hani Rice Terraces. For Film 1, the Chinese script was the direct source of the English subtitles; the Hani narration was a separate translation from Chinese. For Film 2, the corpus represented the revised bilingual version, with English subtitles added after selection. Table 1 distinguishes the subtitle entries from the culturally meaningful units identified for analysis.

Table 1. Corpus and coded-unit overview

Film	Subtitle entries	ECR units	LCE units	All coded units	Corpus share (%)
Film 1	65	19	6	25	23.6
Film 2	296	62	19	81	76.4
Total	361	81	25	106	100.0

Subtitle entries are source-corpus metadata. A coded meaning unit may span several entries. Corpus share uses all 106 coded units.

The two sheets contained 65 and 296 subtitle entries, yielding 25 and 81 coded units respectively. These

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comprised 19 and 62 ECRs and six and 19 LCEs. Subtitle entries describe the source material, whereas coded units define the observations analysed. The corpus shares therefore refer to the distribution of the 106 coded units between the films. The analytical sequence connected unit identification, separate coding of cultural referents and expressions, meaning assessment, and review (Figure 1).

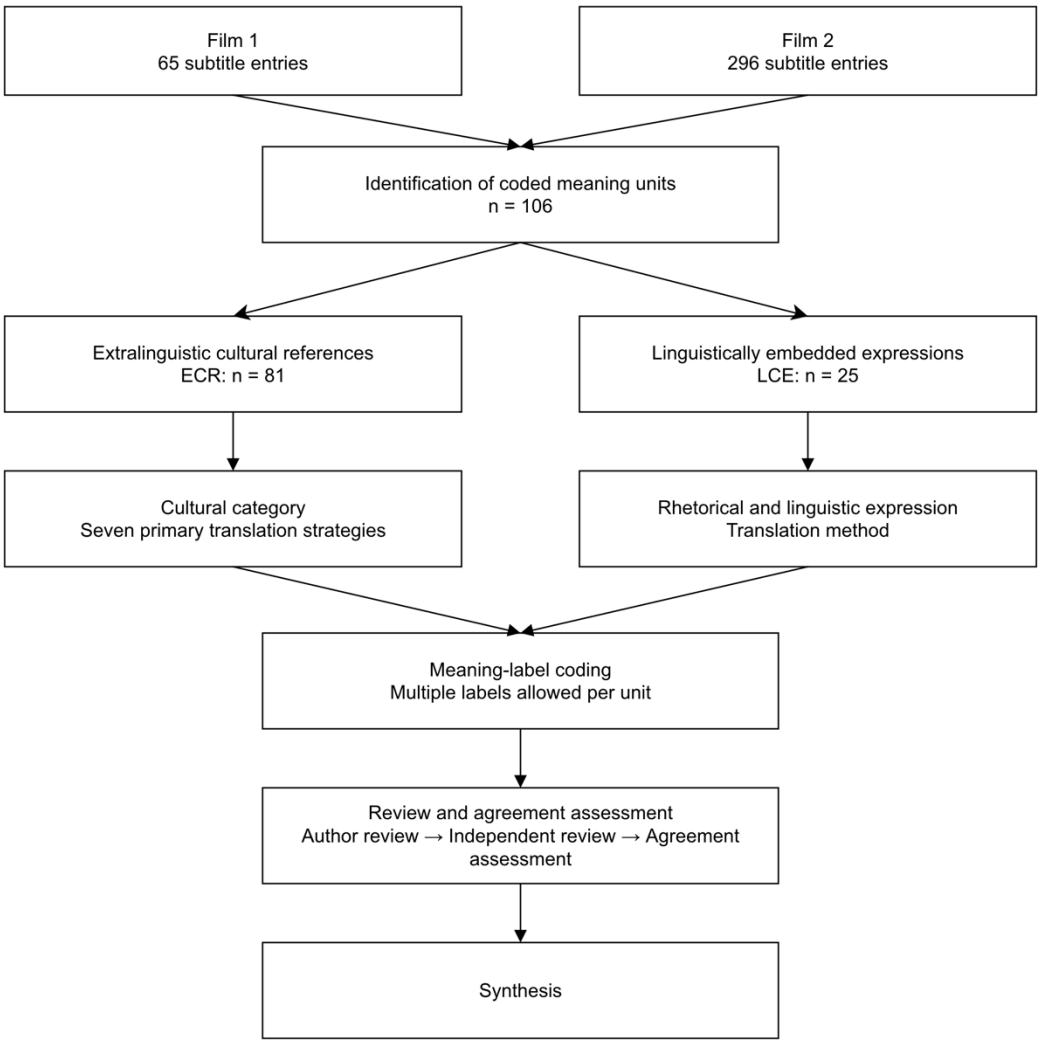


Figure 1. Research workflow.

The 106 coded meaning units were separated into ECR and LCE layers, analysed through their respective coding schemes, and brought together through meaning labels, author review, independent review, and synthesis.

4.2 Meaning units and coding categories

A meaning unit was a cultural referent or expression whose English treatment could be assessed independently. Units could occupy one subtitle entry or extend across adjacent entries. Each record retained an identifier, film, subtitle span, timecode, Chinese text, and English rendering. Segmentation followed the analytical purpose, consistent with O'Connor and Joffe's discussion of coding units.[16] Ordinary vocabulary was not included solely because it occurred in Chinese; repeated expressions were recorded separately when

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their contextual function or rendering warranted distinct analysis.

ECRs referred to culturally specific entities, practices, institutions, landscapes, and administrative or heritage concepts, following Pedersen's distinction between extralinguistic referents and meaning embedded in linguistic form.[10] LCE was an operational term for expressions whose cultural significance depended primarily on metaphor, proverbial wording, allusion, evaluation, or reflexive rhetoric. These included the filmmaker's expressions as well as expressions about local life. A single subtitle span could yield one ECR record for its cultural referents and a separate LCE record for its expressive formulation. For example, a subtitle naming forests, villages, and terraces was coded at the ECR layer, while its description of them as a "living tapestry" was coded separately at the LCE layer.

Each ECR received one primary cultural category: ecological knowledge; agricultural/hydraulic practice; community institution/property; belief/ritual/cosmology; material culture/landscape; heritage/administrative term; or identity/place/name. These seven categories were operationalised for this corpus. Assignment followed the referent's contextual function rather than its wording alone. For example, author review established that the local well designation "Longtan" belonged to material culture/landscape, rather than establishing a belief reference from the name itself.

ECR renderings were classified using Pedersen's seven strategies.[10] Retention preserves the source form; specification adds explanatory or particularising information; direct translation transfers basic semantic content; generalisation reduces specificity; substitution replaces the reference with another expression or reference; omission leaves the item unrendered; and official equivalent uses an official or established conventional counterpart. One primary strategy was counted per unit, with further observations retained in the notes. LCE coding separately distinguished literal rendering, which retains the main rhetorical or imagistic structure, from paraphrase, which restates the expression through rewording or explanation. The codebook also allowed rhetorical replacement, condensation, and deletion. LCE forms were described qualitatively rather than assigned mutually exclusive rhetorical subcategories.

4.3 Assessing cultural meaning

Both coding layers received meaning labels based on the paired texts, adjacent context, and analytical notes. Preservation (PRE) denotes the retention of cultural specificity, propositions, relations, or imagery. Accessibility (ACC) identifies wording that makes a referent or proposition more explicit in English and concerns textual explicitness rather than measured audience comprehension. Neutralisation (NEU) marks reduced cultural specificity, institutional distinctions, or rhetorical force. Reframing (REF) denotes a changed relationship, evaluative position, or narrative frame. Ambiguity (AMB) identifies uncertainty in reference or wording; information loss (LOS) records the loss of key content; and insufficient evidence (UNC) marks an unresolved meaning judgement. Sun's analysis informed the concept of neutralisation,[8] while the seven-label scheme was operationalised for this study.

Labels were assessed individually and could co-occur. A unit could preserve an image while changing its framing, or make a proposition explicit while introducing a different relationship. Strategy codes did not automatically determine meaning labels. Close reading connected these judgements to ecological relations and practices, heritage identities and evaluations, and governance relations among local actors. These three

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themes organised interpretation across the coding categories; they were not additional quantitative variables. Visual interpretation was confined to corresponding scenes already examined and documented in the research records.

4.4 Author review and independent coding review

Review procedures and reporting drew on O'Connor and Joffe's guidance on coding transparency.[16] Author review resolved 20 questions concerning referents, facts, terminology, and discourse attribution, with decisions retained in a log. Independent review covered 23 units: six from Film 1 and 17 from Film 2. Stratified maximum-variation selection was followed by a fixed randomised presentation order. The reviewer received a sheet concealing the primary researcher's codes and recorded inclusion, unit type, cultural category, strategy or reformulation method, meaning labels, and comments. Coding confidence, review coverage, and primary-strategy agreement are reported separately in Table 2.

Table 2. Coding confidence and independent-review status

Review indicator	Film 1	Film 2	Total / status
Coding confidence A	24 (96.0%)	77 (95.1%)	101 (95.3%)
Coding confidence B	1 (4.0%)	4 (4.9%)	5 (4.7%)
Units labelled UNC	0	4	4
Blind-review sample prepared	6	17	23 (21.7%)
Agreement / Cohen's kappa	80.0% / 0.706	84.6% / 0.806	83.3% / 0.795

A: reliable text and relatively stable coding; B: reliable text but facts or coding boundaries still need external evidence. UNC (Uncertainty) is a meaning-interpretation tag, not a confidence grade. Confidence percentages use all coding units (Film 1: 25; Film 2: 81; total: 106).

The last row reports primary translation-strategy agreement only for units identified by both coders as extralinguistic cultural references (ECR): Film 1, 4/5; Film 2, 11/13; total, 15/18. The pooled κ is calculated from all 18 pairs.

Confidence A indicated reliable text and relatively stable coding; confidence B indicated reliable text with a factual or interpretive boundary requiring external evidence. There were 101 A-rated units and five B-rated units. The four UNC records were meaning judgements, a separate indicator. Agreement was calculated for the 18 units identified as ECRs by both coders: 15/18 judgements agreed (83.3%; Cohen's $\kappa = 0.795$). Film 1 yielded 4/5 agreements (80.0%; $\kappa = 0.706$), and Film 2 yielded 11/13 (84.6%; $\kappa = 0.806$). Pooled κ used all 18 paired judgements and chance agreement derived from the coders' marginal strategy frequencies. Four jointly identified LCEs and one unit-type disagreement were outside this calculation. Disagreements remained documented, and Results followed the final primary coding.

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4.5 Descriptive synthesis, case selection and researcher position

ECR strategy percentages used the within-film totals of 19 and 62; LCE method percentages used six and 19. Meaning-label percentages divided the units bearing each label by the corresponding film-and-layer total and could sum to more than 100%. Category–strategy cross-tabulation used pooled ECR counts. Comparisons were descriptive. Seven purposively selected cases illustrated five ECR strategies and the two LCE methods observed in the final coding. Their paired wording was reproduced unchanged and interpreted alongside the coding notes; additional ecological records retained their identifiers for traceability.

The primary researcher participated in filming, editing, English translation, and corpus preparation. This involvement was made explicit through the text checks, codebook, and decision log, in keeping with reflexive attention to representation.[4] Participant speech, narration, and researcher interpretation retained distinct attribution. Sensitive participants and village or institutional relationships followed the project's anonymisation conventions, including Village L, Village C, and Village J.

5. Results

5.1 Local cultural life represented in the two documentaries

Local cultural references centred on ecological knowledge, community institutions, and heritage recognition. Across the 81 ECRs, community institution/property accounted for 25 units (30.9%), ecological knowledge for 19 (23.5%), and heritage/administrative terms for 16 (19.8%). Together, these three categories represented 60 units (74.1%). Agricultural/hydraulic practice contributed nine units, identity/place/name six, material culture/landscape five, and belief/ritual/cosmology one. The coded cultural content thus extended from landscapes and practical knowledge to the organisation of community life and the designation of heritage status.

The film-specific coding showed different concentrations within this overall composition. Film 1 contained 11 ecological references among its 19 ECRs (57.9%), together with three agricultural/hydraulic references, two material/landscape references, two identity/place/name references, and one heritage/administrative term. Film 2 contained all 25 community institution/property references, comprising 40.3% of its ECRs, and 15 heritage/administrative terms (24.2%). Its remaining references covered ecological knowledge (eight), agricultural/hydraulic practice (six), identity/place/name (four), material culture/landscape (three), and belief/ritual/cosmology (one). Film 1 therefore concentrated its representation on ecological life and the terraced landscape, whereas Film 2 distributed attention across community institutions, heritage status, and resource governance. The difference identifies two complementary dimensions of local cultural life rather than a difference in the overall presence of cultural content.

The LCEs extended cultural representation into imagery and narrative evaluation. Film 1's six expressions included the "living tapestry", the "aerial ocean" and "green reservoir", embodied heritage "felt on the tongue", and links between heritage and hope. Film 2's 19 expressions included proverbial imagery, metaphors of heritage recognition, evaluations of social change, and reflections on filmmaking. The reference to "Ariadne's thread" in F2-C52 belonged to the filmmaker's account of property relations, rather than to an

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inventory of Hani traditions. ECRs and LCEs therefore captured complementary aspects of the films: the cultural referents discussed and the expressive forms through which local life was narrated.

5.2 Rendering local cultural content in English

Direct translation was the most frequent ECR strategy overall, accounting for 30/81 units (37.0%). Official equivalent followed with 18 units (22.2%), while specification and generalisation each accounted for 14 (17.3%). Substitution and omission each occurred twice, and retention once. Table 3 reports the complete ECR distribution.

Table 3. ECR translation strategies by film

ECR strategy	Film 1 n	Film 1 %	Film 2 n	Film 2 %	Total n	Total %
Retention	0	0.0	1	1.6	1	1.2
Specification	3	15.8	11	17.7	14	17.3
Direct translation	10	52.6	20	32.3	30	37.0
Generalisation	1	5.3	13	21.0	14	17.3
Substitution	1	5.3	1	1.6	2	2.5
Omission	2	10.5	0	0.0	2	2.5
Official equivalent	2	10.5	16	25.8	18	22.2
Total	19	100.0	62	100.0	81	100.0

Percentages use ECR denominators: Film 1 = 19, Film 2 = 62, total = 81. LCEs are excluded by design. Percentages may differ from 100.0 by rounding.

When the films were compared, Film 1 showed a stronger concentration in direct translation, while Film 2 had several strategies with relatively large shares (Figure 2).

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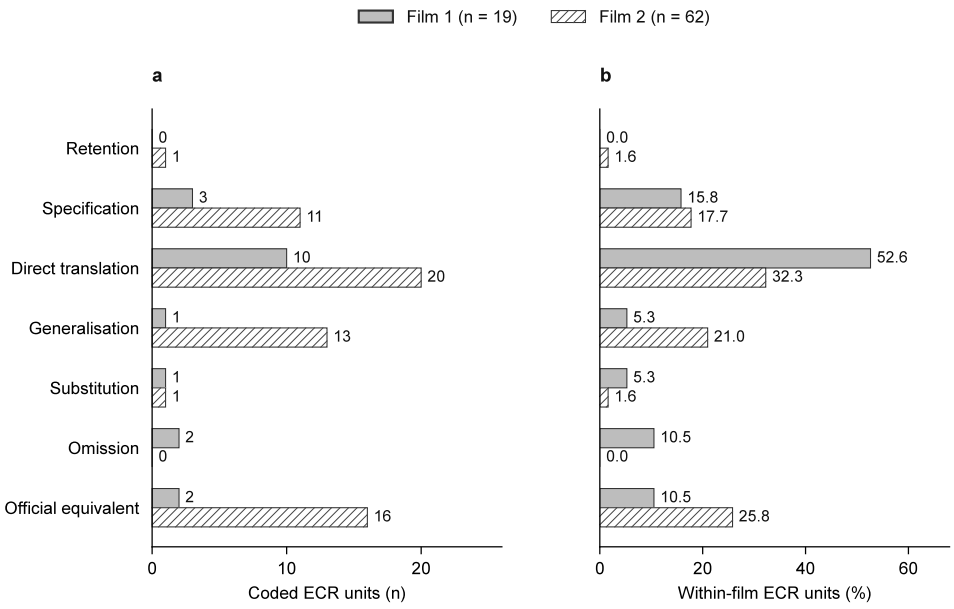


Figure 2. ECR translation strategies by film.

Panel a shows counts; panel b shows within-film percentages, using 19 ECRs for Film 1 and 62 for Film 2. Each ECR contributes one primary strategy.

Direct translation accounted for 10/19 ECRs in Film 1 (52.6%), compared with 20/62 in Film 2 (32.3%). Although Film 2 contained twice as many directly translated units, their proportional share was lower. Its distribution also included substantial shares of official equivalents (25.8%) and generalisation (21.0%), compared with 10.5% and 5.3% in Film 1. Specification occupied similar proportions, 15.8% and 17.7%. Film 1's concentration in direct translation indicates a comparatively consistent reliance on direct lexical transfer for its predominantly ecological references. Film 2 used a broader repertoire in which direct expression was combined with conventional institutional naming and less specific formulations. Omission occurred only in Film 1, and source-form retention only in Film 2, but neither was frequent enough to define the profile of either film.

The pooled category–strategy distribution located these operations within particular kinds of cultural content (Figure 3).

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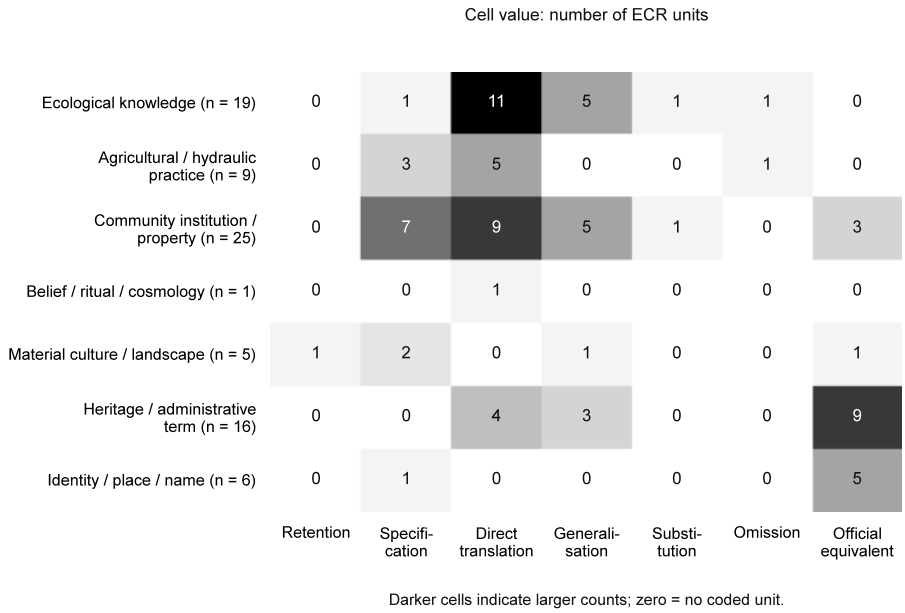


Figure 3. Cultural category and primary ECR strategy across both films.

Cell values are counts, with category totals shown in the row labels. Darker cells indicate larger counts; zero denotes no coded unit. The matrix pools 81 ECRs and is not a film-specific comparison.

Direct translation concentrated in ecological knowledge (11/19) and agricultural/hydraulic practice (5/9). Official equivalents concentrated in heritage/administrative terms (9/16) and identity/place/name (5/6). Community institution/property references were spread across direct translation (nine), specification (seven), generalisation (five), official equivalent (three), and substitution (one). The clustered cells therefore identify different translation tasks within the corpus. Ecological description was most often carried through direct lexical correspondence; heritage and identity references depended heavily on conventional names; and community institutions required a mixture of naming, explanation, and generalisation. The more dispersed institutional row is evidence that governance content was not rendered through one stable operation.

LCE methods followed a separate distribution in the coding records. All six Film 1 LCEs used literal rendering. Film 2 contained 12 literal renderings (63.2%) and seven paraphrases (36.8%); no other LCE method occurred. Film 1 thus consistently retained the principal rhetorical structure of its coded expressions. Film 2 also retained many expressive forms, but its additional concentration of paraphrases shows that figurative and evaluative language was more often restated in explanatory wording. These LCE counts are separate from the ECR strategies reported in Table 3 and answer a different question: how the films' culturally meaningful ways of saying were reformulated after their cultural referents had been identified.

5.3 Preservation and change in cultural meaning

Preservation was the most frequent meaning label in every film-and-layer group, making continuity of cultural meaning the strongest shared pattern. The subtitles therefore did not primarily remove the cultural content identified in the corpus. Other labels show why this overall continuity cannot be equated with complete

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semantic stability: retained referents or images could also become more explicit, less specific, ambiguous, or relationally reframed (Figure 4).

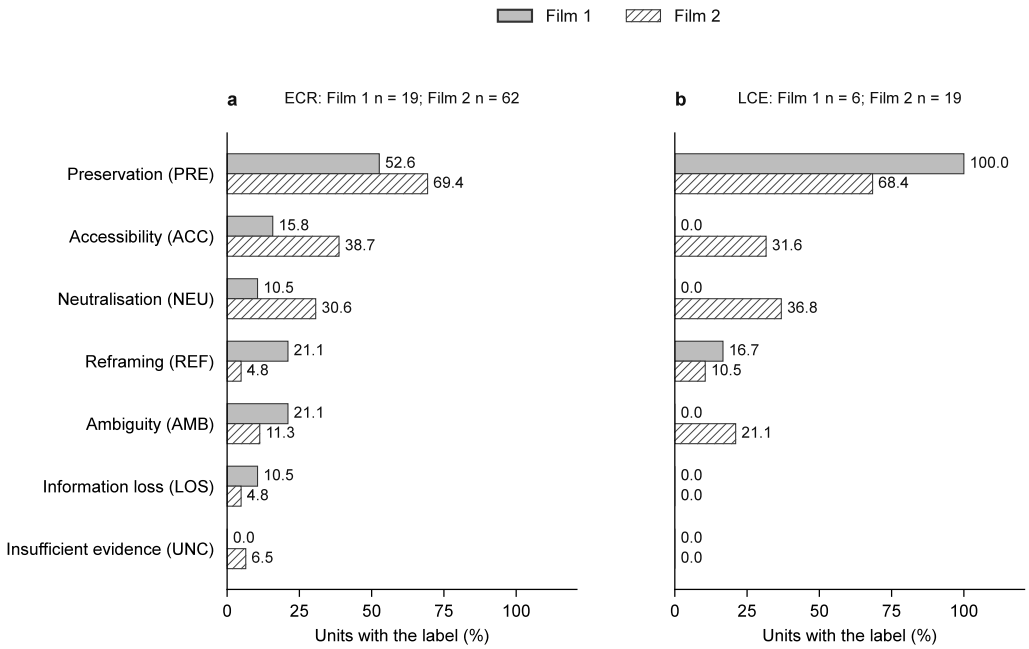


Figure 4. Meaning-label prevalence by film and coding layer.

Panel a reports ECRs (Film 1: n = 19; Film 2: n = 62); panel b reports LCEs (Film 1: n = 6; Film 2: n = 19). Percentages use the number of units bearing each label divided by the relevant group total. Multiple labels are allowed, so percentages need not sum to 100%. UNC denotes insufficient evidence for a meaning judgement.

Among ECRs, PRE occurred in 10/19 units in Film 1 (52.6%) and 43/62 in Film 2 (69.4%). Film 2 also had higher proportions of ACC (38.7% versus 15.8%) and NEU (30.6% versus 10.5%). Its higher preservation rate therefore coexisted with more frequent explicitness and reduced specificity. Film 1 had a higher proportion of REF: four units (21.1%), compared with three (4.8%) in Film 2. The two films consequently did not form a simple opposition between preservation in one and change in the other. In both, the dominant continuity of cultural content was accompanied by a smaller but analytically important set of changes in how that content was qualified or related.

The LCE results showed a similar distinction between retained content and changes in its presentation. All six Film 1 LCEs carried PRE, including one also labelled REF. Film 2 had 13 PRE units (68.4%), seven NEU (36.8%), six ACC (31.6%), and two REF (10.5%). Its combination of literal rendering and paraphrase therefore accompanied both rhetorical continuity and changes in expression. A preservation label identified retained meaning, not an absence of change in every aspect of the unit.

Ambiguity occurred in four Film 1 ECRs (21.1%) and seven Film 2 ECRs (11.3%). It also appeared in four Film 2 LCEs (21.1%), but none in Film 1. Information loss was recorded in two and three ECRs respectively and in no LCEs. Film 2's three LOS records occurred despite the absence of ECR omission as a primary strategy, distinguishing loss of key meaning from complete omission of an item. Its four UNC records, all

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ECRs, remained separately identified. The label distributions locate these outcomes; close reading identifies the wording and cultural relations involved.

5.4 Ecological relations, heritage identities and governance meanings

The seven cases in Table 4 show how cultural meaning was retained or changed through particular renderings. They bring together continued ecological imagery, preserved institutional naming, reduced specificity, and changes in relationships attributed to local actors.

Table 4.Illustrative Chinese-English cases

Case / layer	Chinese source item	English rendering	Strategy / labels	Analytical note
F2-C37 ECR	一亩杉木树	one mu of fir trees	Retention NEU;AMB	The local unit mu is retained without conversion or explanation.
F2-C20 ECR	水库所在的村集体	the collectives that own the reservoirs	Specification ACC;REF;LOS	Ownership is added although the source locates the reservoir in a village collective.
F1-C11 ECR	刻木分水制度	carved wood distribution	Direct translation NEU;AMB	Component meanings are transferred; the allocation institution is less explicit.
F2-C31 ECR	2006 年新林改	the new forest reform implemented in 2006	Generalisation ACC;NEU	A specific collective forest-tenure reform becomes a generic forest reform.
F2-C14 ECR	国家湿地公园试点	National Wetland Park pilot project	Official equivalent PRE	A conventional institutional designation is retained.
F1-C04 LCE	交织成一幅活的图景	formed a living tapestry	Literal rendering PRE	The tapestry metaphor is retained.
F2-C15 LCE	竞逐另一项桂冠	sought another prestigious title	Paraphrase NEU;ACC	A title is made explicit while the crown metaphor is neutralised.

Seven purposively selected cases illustrate five ECR strategies and two observed LCE methods. Source items and English renderings reproduce the coding fields. The notes are analytical summaries. PRE: preservation; ACC: accessibility; NEU: neutralisation; REF: reframing; AMB: ambiguity; LOS: information loss.

Ecological representation combined recognisable landscape elements with language describing their connections. Jiao et al.'s account of ecological knowledge and resource management provides contextual grounds for attending to relationships within the Hani terrace landscape.[1] In Film 1, F1-C03 named forests, villages, and terraces, while the associated LCE, F1-C04, rendered " 交织成一幅活的图景 " as "formed a living tapestry". The English preserved the interweaving and living imagery by expressing it through "tapestry". The

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local landscape was consequently presented as a connected configuration, with the figurative formulation carrying the relationship among its components. This was the specific cultural meaning retained in the PRE-labelled expression.

A related passage in Film 2 showed a different treatment of ecological relationships. F2-C53 rendered “森林—村庄—梯田—水系四素同构系统” as “a system of forest–village–terrace–water”. All four named elements remained, but the formulation “四素同构” was reduced to the general term “system”. The unit was coded as generalisation and NEU. The English kept the four components, but it made their relationship less specific. When this example is considered together with “living tapestry”, two parts of ecological representation become visible: the naming of landscape elements and the way their connection is expressed.

The water-allocation example shows ambiguity in the institutional role of a practice. In F1-C11, “刻木分水制度” was translated as “carved wood distribution”. “Carved wood” kept the material element and “distribution” suggested allocation, but the English did not clearly say that water was distributed or that this was an institution. The unit therefore received the NEU and AMB labels. The direct translation kept parts of the source phrase, although its function became less clear. This limits what the frequent direct translation of agricultural/hydraulic references can show; the strategy alone does not mean that the institution is fully expressed.

F2-C37 shows a different kind of ambiguity because the local unit of measurement was retained. “一亩杉木树” was translated as “one mu of fir trees”. The word “mu” remained in the subtitle, but its quantity was not explained or converted. The table therefore records NEU and AMB, since the amount of planted land depends on an unexplained unit. The local form was kept, but its measurement was not given. Taken together, this and the water-allocation case point to two specific problems: an unclear institutional function and an unexplained quantity.

The heritage cases also separate an official name from the language used to evaluate recognition. In F2-C14, “国家湿地公园试点” was translated as “National Wetland Park pilot project”. Both the institutional designation and its pilot status remained explicit, supporting the official-equivalent strategy and PRE label. The subtitle presented a specific named status rather than replacing it with a generic description of environmental or heritage value. This case gives a concrete meaning to the concentration of official equivalents in heritage/administrative references.

By comparison, F2-C15 rendered “竞逐另一项桂冠” as “sought another prestigious title”. The English made the pursuit of a title explicit while removing the crown metaphor, supporting ACC and NEU. The adjective “prestigious” still expressed positive evaluation: the change lay in the figurative formulation and the wording of pursuit, rather than the elimination of all evaluative meaning. Together, these two cases show that a heritage status can retain its specificity while the narrative voice describing recognition is reformulated. Institutional names and evaluative expressions thus make different contributions to the English presentation of heritage.

Governance meanings changed through both generalisation and specification. In F2-C31, “2006年新林改” became “the new forest reform implemented in 2006”. Author review identified the abbreviated source reference as collective forest-tenure reform. The English expanded the reference into an explicit reform event and

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retained the year, but described it through the broader "forest reform", leaving its collective-tenure specificity unstated. The ACC and NEU labels therefore concerned different aspects of the same unit: the event was explicitly expressed, while the institutional referent became more general. The policy identification here derives from the recorded author clarification of the source reference.

F2-C20 involved a change in the relationship attributed to a community actor. "水库所在的村集体" identified the village collective in which a reservoir was located. The English, "the collectives that own the reservoirs", instead specified ownership. The relative clause supplied a definite relationship, supporting ACC, but replaced the source's locative relation with a property claim, supporting REF and LOS. The information lost was the original basis of the association between the reservoir and the collective. This was more than a change in terminology: the subtitle attributed a different relationship to the actor. Read with the forest-reform example, it shows why governance analysis must examine the institutional content of a generalisation and the particular proposition introduced by an explanation.

5.5 Comparing cross-cultural mediation across the films

The cross-film comparison brings the content, rendering, and meaning results into a single pattern. Film 1 concentrated on ecological knowledge and landscape relations; its ECRs were dominated by direct translation, and all six LCEs used literal rendering. This combination sustained prominent ecological images, including the interwoven landscape represented as a living tapestry. At the same time, direct lexical transfer did not always preserve institutional function, as shown by the less explicit rendering of the water-allocation practice. Film 1 therefore demonstrates that rhetorical continuity can coexist with reduced specificity in the practical relations underlying an ecological landscape.

Film 2 focused more on community institutions, heritage designations, and governance relations. Direct translation, official equivalents, specification, and generalisation all appeared in its ECR results, and seven of its 19 LCEs were paraphrased. This wider range was related to the work required in the film, such as naming formal status, explaining cultural evaluation, and describing reforms and local actors. Many institutional referents were kept in the subtitles, but some explanations made collective-tenure content more general or changed a locative relation into ownership. Film 2 therefore makes especially visible the distinction between making an institutional account legible in English and preserving every relationship stated in the source.

The shared result is selective continuity rather than either wholesale preservation or wholesale loss. Both films retained cultural names, propositions, and images in more than half of the units in every film-and-layer group, while the accompanying labels located changes in specificity, explicitness, evaluation, and actor relations. Their production contexts situate this comparison: Film 1 incorporated English into a condensed multilingual competition version, whereas Film 2 added English to a longer Chinese-subtitled account with sustained institutional discussion. These circumstances identify the versions analysed and the different communicative work presented to subtitling; they do not establish that production pathway caused the observed differences. Across the two films, cross-cultural mediation consisted in organising different aspects of local cultural life into English while selectively maintaining or reformulating the relations through which those aspects acquired meaning.

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6. Discussion

6.1 Making local cultural relations explicit in English

The central finding is that preservation was the dominant meaning outcome, but preservation operated at more than one level. Across both films, subtitles frequently retained cultural referents, propositions, and images. Yet the same unit could preserve a recognisable object while altering its institutional qualification, evaluative form, or relationship to a community actor. Local cultural representation therefore depended on both referential continuity and relational continuity. The first concerns whether an English viewer can identify the landscape element, practice, institution, or heritage status being discussed; the second concerns what the subtitle states about how those elements function and relate to one another.

This point agrees with Jiao et al., who describe ecological knowledge through the organisation of the landscape and the management of resources. [1] Luo also links water circulation and shared management with ecological processes and social cooperation. [13] In relation to these studies, the frequent direct translation of ecological and hydraulic references needs to be considered more carefully. Direct correspondence was effective when the source named visible landscape components or sustained an image such as interweaving, but it was less sufficient when cultural knowledge resided in the institutional function linking materials, water, and allocation. The data thus locate cultural specificity in relations and functions as well as in culturally recognisable vocabulary.

The findings refine the relationship between translation strategy and cultural meaning. Sun shows that cultural specificity can be neutralised through several translation operations. [8] The present results add that neutralisation can coexist with preservation within the same unit: a referent may remain identifiable while one qualification or relationship becomes less specific. Pedersen's strategy framework identifies the principal operation used for an ECR, but the strategy label alone cannot determine this relational outcome. [10] Specification is the clearest example. It can improve textual accessibility by supplying an explicit relation, yet the supplied proposition must still be compared with the source. Cultural communication analysis therefore needs both an operational account of how an item is translated and a meaning-level account of what the resulting English says about local life.

6.2 Heritage naming and cultural evaluation

The heritage findings show that institutional designation and cultural evaluation perform different representational functions. Official equivalents made recognised statuses and place identities legible in English, accounting for the concentration of that strategy in heritage/administrative and identity/place/name references. Narrative metaphors and evaluative expressions positioned those designations within stories of recognition and development. The subtitles could therefore preserve the formal identity being named while reformulating the voice through which its value was communicated. Naming continuity and evaluative continuity should be assessed separately.

Smith's understanding of heritage as a cultural process directs attention to the articulation of value, identity, and authority rather than treating heritage as a self-explanatory property of an object. [11] Kirshenblatt-Gimblett's account of metacultural production similarly foregrounds the work through which practices and their

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bearers are selected and presented as heritage. [12] The subtitle results give this theoretical distinction a textual form. An official name answers what status is recognised; the surrounding verb, modifier, or metaphor contributes an account of how that recognition is valued and pursued. Accurate institutional terminology is therefore an important component of cultural representation, but it is not a complete account of the cultural meaning organised around the designation.

Governance meanings extend the same point from evaluation to actor relations. Wu and Sun describe the Hani-terrace heritage setting through interactions among governing institutions, tourism interventions, and villagers' practices. [14] Within the present corpus, community institution/property references formed the largest ECR category and also the most dispersed strategy profile. This dispersion corresponds to the varied work required to name collectives, explain reforms, and state relationships to resources. Generalising a collective-tenure reform reduced an institutional distinction, while specifying ownership changed the relation attributed to a village collective. These are culturally consequential changes because they reorganise how English narration positions local actors within heritage and resource governance.

6.3 Situated and reflexive cross-cultural mediation

The two production contexts clarify why cross-cultural mediation must be treated as a situated practice. Film 1 incorporated English into a short multilingual version centred on ecological resilience. Film 2 added English to a longer Chinese-subtitled version whose narrative devoted more attention to heritage recognition, community institutions, and resource relations. The comparison does not use these pathways as causal explanations. It shows that subtitling encountered different clusters of cultural content and consequently performed different combinations of direct description, formal naming, explanation, and rhetorical reformulation.

Henley places subtitling among the editorial decisions through which ethnographic filmmakers shape access to speech and expression. [5] Xiong and Li likewise connect ethnographic representation with relationships among filmmakers, represented subjects, images, and texts. [4] The present comparison specifies the cultural consequences visible in those decisions. In Film 1, mediation centred on carrying ecological images and practical knowledge into concise English formulations. In Film 2, it more often involved making institutional identities and governance propositions legible. Their similarity lies in the predominance of preservation; their difference lies in which aspects of local culture required explanation and where that explanation altered specificity or relation.

The researcher's participation in filming, editing, translation, and corpus preparation makes reflexivity part of this account. Author review clarified abbreviated referents and production facts, but it did not override the wording retained in the corpus. Close source-subtitle comparison instead distinguishes intended cultural presentation from the propositions actually supplied by the English text. This makes the role of subtitles in cross-cultural mediation easier to see. Cultural content is made accessible in English, but it is also arranged through particular names, evaluations, and relations between actors. In these two films, mediation became most noticeable when recognisability and relational meaning did not change in the same way.

6.4 Limitations

This comparison is based on two films produced through the researcher's participation in filmmaking in one

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region. The films differ in length, subject matter, language pathway, and stage of circulation. These differences cannot be separated well enough to show a causal effect of production context, so the findings cannot represent Hani documentaries in general. They only describe the cultural meanings found in the source–subtitle pairs examined here.

The researcher worked as filmmaker, translator, and researcher, and this overlap also affects interpretation. An independent reviewer checked 23 coded units, but the agreement reported here only covers primary strategies in the 18 units that both coders identified as ECRs. The agreement was 83.3%, and the pooled Cohen's κ was 0.795. These figures do not show reliability for every cultural category, LCE method, or meaning label; the coding records and close readings are still needed when these judgements are assessed.

The analysis compares Chinese source texts with English subtitles. It does not include audience testing or an independent linguistic assessment of the Hani narration. Here, accessibility means that something is explicit in the text; it does not prove that viewers understood it. Reading speed, character density, and cognitive load were not measured. Regional studies provide background, but subtitle wording alone cannot confirm village facts, botanical identities, or ecological causes. The conclusions are limited to the cultural meanings in these source–subtitle pairs and the interpretive procedures used here.

7. Conclusion

The two documentaries deal with different but related parts of Hani local cultural life. Film 1 mainly presents ecological knowledge, relations in the terraced landscape, and figurative descriptions of interdependence. Film 2 pays more attention to community institutions, heritage and administrative identities, and resource governance. ECRs cover the practices, places, institutions, and designations used to narrate this cultural life, while LCEs include the metaphors and evaluative expressions used to place it in each film. The distributions do not only show different amounts of cultural material. They also show that the two films give different emphasis to parts of the same living-heritage setting.

The subtitles use a limited range of methods, but their weight differs between the films. Direct translation dominated Film 1 and remained the largest ECR strategy in Film 2; official equivalents, generalisation, and specification also had notable shares in Film 2. All Film 1 LCEs and most Film 2 LCEs used literal rendering, while paraphrase ranked second in Film 2. The category-strategy results help explain the pattern: ecological descriptions were usually linked with direct translation, heritage and identity references with official equivalents, and community institutions with several operations. The form of English rendering was thus closely connected to the kind of cultural content being presented.

Preservation was the most frequent meaning label in both films and in both coding layers, making continuity the principal result. At the same time, preservation often concerned a referent, proposition, or image rather than every feature of the source expression. Some subtitles made an item more accessible while reducing institutional specificity; others preserved a formal designation while reformulating evaluation, or supplied an explicit actor relation different from the source. Ambiguity and information loss occurred at identifiable points, including an unexplained local measure, an unclear allocation function, and a changed basis for associating a collective with a reservoir. English accessibility, cultural specificity, and relational accuracy there-

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fore need to be evaluated as distinct dimensions.

The cross-film comparison shows subtitling as situated cross-cultural mediation rather than a single movement toward either preservation or neutralisation. The films' different production pathways locate the English texts within particular acts of documentary making, while their thematic differences place different cultural tasks before the subtitles. Across both cases, English wording preserved much of the local cultural account but also selected how ecological connections, heritage value, and governance relations became explicit. The study's contribution to cultural communication lies in separating translation operation from meaning outcome and in showing why the recognisability of a cultural name or image cannot stand as evidence that its surrounding institutional qualification, evaluation, or actor relation has also been retained.

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