

# Subtitle Translation of the Game *Black Myth: Wukong* from the Perspective of Intercultural Communication

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**Abstract:** This study investigates the subtitle translation of the Chinese game *Black Myth: Wukong* from an intercultural communication perspective. Grounded in Edward T. Hall's theory of high-and low-context cultures, the research analyzes various in-game text cases. It identifies three core translation strategies employed: explanatory translation, substitutive translation, and creative translation. The findings demonstrate that translators effectively address the tension between cultural uniqueness and audience comprehension through these strategies: using explanatory translation for culture-specific terms, applying substitutive translation for functional equivalence, and adopting creative translation to reconstruct cultural imagery. These approaches not only accurately convey the core connotations of the source culture but also ensure a smooth and emotionally resonant experience for global players, achieving the dual objectives of cultural transmission and gameplay immersion. This research provides practical insights for the localization of games featuring distinctive Chinese cultural content and contributes to the application of intercultural communication theory in the digital entertainment field.

**Keywords:** Intercultural Communication; *Black Myth: Wukong*; Subtitle Translation; Explanatory Translation; Substitutive Translation; Creative Translation



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## 1 Introduction

With the deepening development of modern science and technology, such as the internet, the gaming industry has become a significant platform for cultural exchange. Particularly in China, the rise of domestically produced games in recent years has not only achieved great success in the domestic market but has also begun to gradually enter the international market. *Black Myth: Wukong*, as China's first "5A" (High Cost, High Volume, High Technology, High Quality, High Revenue) Souls-like game, is based on the Chinese classic *Journey to the West*. With its exquisite graphics, rich storyline, and unique cultural elements, it has attracted considerable attention from players both

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domestically and internationally. The success of this game not only demonstrates the strength of Chinese game development but also provides a new opportunity for the global dissemination of Chinese culture.

However, for *Black Myth: Wukong* to gain wider recognition in the international market, the quality of its subtitle translation is crucial. Subtitle translation is not merely a linguistic conversion but also a transmission of culture. As a game rich in Chinese cultural elements, *Black Myth: Wukong* involves numerous mythological allusions, historical references, and philosophical concepts. These subtitles often lack direct equivalents in the translation process, which can easily lead to comprehension difficulties for target language players. How to maintain the original cultural characteristics while ensuring that target language players can understand and accept them is a pressing issue that needs to be addressed. Therefore, researching the subtitle translation of *Black Myth: Wukong* from an intercultural communication perspective holds significant practical importance.

## 2 Theoretical Framework of Intercultural Communication

In the field of intercultural communication studies, Edward T. Hall's theory of High-Context Culture (HC) and Low-Context Culture (LC) provides an important analytical framework for understanding communicative behaviors across different cultural backgrounds (Hall, 1976). In high-context cultures, the transmission of information relies on context, non-verbal cues, and shared cultural background, with verbal expressions often being implicit and indirect, such as in Asian countries like China and Japan (Zhao, 2025; Tang & Zhang, 2005). Conversely, in low-context cultures like the United States and Germany, information is primarily conveyed through explicit, direct linguistic encoding, with context playing a smaller role (Hall, 1976; Peng, 2004).

The differences between high-context and low-context cultures profoundly influence individuals' thinking patterns, communication styles, and cultural adaptation strategies. Zhao (2025) points out that high-context cultures tend towards collectivism, relationship orientation, and implicit expression, while low-context cultures emphasize individualism, task orientation, and direct communication. Tang and Zhang (2005) further categorized conversation styles into high involvement style and high considerateness style, noting that the former is common in low-context cultures, while the latter is more frequent in high-context cultures. Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory further indicates that dimensions such as "Individualism vs. Collectivism" and "Power Distance" are closely related to context levels (Hofstede, 1984; Peng, 2004). Regarding cross-cultural adaptation, Li and Sun (2008) note that factors such as cultural distance, social support, and differences in values significantly impact an individual's adaptation process. Berry's two-dimensional acculturation model proposes four strategies: integration, assimilation, separation, and marginalization, with the "integration" strategy being most conducive to cross-cultural adaptation (Berry, 2005; Li & Sun, 2008). To enhance the effectiveness of intercultural communication, researchers propose multiple strategies, including flexibly adjusting communication methods, emphasizing written communication, respecting the cultural habits of others, and conducting cross-cultural training (Zhao, 2025; Li & Sun, 2008).

The theory of high- and low-context cultures not only reveals the deep structure of cultural differences but also provides theoretical guidance for intercultural communication practices. Future research should further incorporate local cultural perspectives to develop more culturally sensitive theoretical frameworks and measurement tools, promoting more equal and effective intercultural dialogue (Peng, 2004; Li & Sun, 2008).

### 3 Translation Studies from the Perspective of Intercultural Communication

Against the backdrop of deepening intercultural research, translation studies have expanded from the traditional level of linguistic conversion to the complex process of cultural dissemination and meaning reconstruction. Translation is not only a bridge between languages but also an important pathway for cultural dialogue and value transmission.

The difference between high-context and low-context cultures is a crucial theoretical foundation for intercultural translation research. Hall's (1976) theory of High-Context (HC) and Low-Context (LC) cultures provides a framework for explaining cultural differences in translation. For instance, when translating implicit expressions from high-context cultures, translators often need to adopt strategies such as liberal translation or amplification to compensate for the cultural default of target language readers (Suo, 2025).

Regarding translation strategies, traditional dichotomies such as literal vs. liberal translation and foreignization vs. domestication have been further expanded from an intercultural perspective. Jiang (2025) points out that international publicity translation should adhere to an "audience awareness," combining the "5W" communication model (Who, What, Which channel, To whom, What effect), and flexibly employ strategies like deletion, adaptation, and localization to enhance the acceptability of the translation. Wei and Chen (2025), using the subtitle translation of *The Legend of the Condor Heroes* as an example, indicate that multimodal discourse analysis theory can assist translators in achieving more precise intercultural transmission across four levels: culture, context, content, and expression.

The translation of culture-loaded words is a difficult point in intercultural translation. Suo (2025), using the English translation of Tang poetry as an example, notes that culture-loaded words possess characteristics such as polysemy, context-dependency, and complex phonological structure. Translators need to flexibly adopt strategies like literal translation, free translation, amplification, or reduction based on the cultural background of the target readers. Chen (2025) further proposes a "defamiliarization translation" strategy, advocating for the retention of the heterogeneity of the source culture through means of alienization and hybridization. For example, W.J.F. Jenner's retention of "Sun Wukong" instead of using "Monkey King" in the English translation of *Journey to the West* enhances cultural identifiability.

In drama and literary translation, the reconstruction of text and the cross-cultural transfer of ethical values are particularly prominent. Lü and Liu (2025), taking the global reception of *The Orphan of Zhao* as an example, point out that the play underwent processes of cultural filtering, misreading, and ethical reconstruction during its intercultural dissemination.

Translation studies from an intercultural perspective emphasize that translation is not only a linguistic act but also a cultural and ethical act. Translators need to possess intercultural awareness, audience awareness, and technical competence to find a balance between preserving cultural heterogeneity and promoting cultural understanding. Future research should further integrate digital humanities technologies, build multilingual, multimodal translation resource platforms, and promote the innovative expression and in-depth dissemination of traditional Chinese culture in international contexts.

### 4 Translation Cases in Black Myth: Wukong

To delve deeper into the application of intercultural communication theory in practice, this section focuses on specific examples of subtitle translation from the game *Black Myth: Wukong*, conducting a detailed textual analysis. The game is rich in culture-specific items, mythological imagery, and philosophical concepts derived from *Journey to*

*the West* and Chinese folk beliefs. Their translation is key to balancing cultural fidelity and audience comprehensibility. Through the analysis of representative dialogues, verses, and culture-loaded expressions within the game, this section systematically examines three core strategies employed by the translators: Explanatory Translation, Substitutive Translation, and Creative Translation. The case studies aim to reveal how translators flexibly use these strategies to build communicative bridges between high and low-context cultures, effectively conveying the unique charm of Chinese culture while ensuring an immersive and emotionally resonant gaming experience for global players. This provides a concrete reference model for the localization of games featuring distinctive Chinese cultural content.

#### 4.1 Explanatory Translation

Explanatory translation refers to the strategy where, when a culture-specific concept, term, or expression in the source language has no equivalent in the target language, the translator abandons its literal form or cultural image and instead explains its core meaning and function. This strategy aims to resolve comprehension barriers caused by cultural default by elucidating its referential meaning, philosophical scope, or functional role, ensuring target language readers can grasp the meaning without obstacles. Its core is “sacrificing form for meaning,” foregoing the specificity of the cultural image to preserve the intelligibility of the meaning.

(ST=Source Text; TT=Target Text)

Example 1

ST: 三界六道，不就毁在这四个字上？我老了，走不完这四洲茫茫之地。

TT: For that word, **all realms and beings** have ruined themselves. I’m old now. Venture through **all the lands**, I cannot.

“三界六道 (Sān jiè liù dào)” is a Buddhist term referring to the entire universe and all life forms. A literal translation (e.g., Three Realms and Six Paths) would be very lengthy and require extensive annotation. The translator meaningfully renders it as “all realms and beings.” Although this loses the specific Buddhist cultural imagery, it perfectly conveys the philosophical scope of “the entire world, everything,” ensuring fluency and comprehensibility. The first part of the source sentence “毁在……上 (ruined because of...)” uses a passive structure, which the target text converts to the active structure “have ruined themselves.” This shift is brilliant. It internalizes the cause of destruction, emphasizing that “all realms and beings” themselves are moving towards ruin due to “that word,” enhancing the philosophical sense of fate and tragedy, making it more powerful than a literal translation. “四洲 (Sì zhōu)” is similarly a Buddhist concept (the Four Great Continents), referring to the entire world. Like the translation of “三界六道,” the translator generalizes it to “all the lands,” preserving the core meaning.

Furthermore, the sentence uses inverted syntax. The normal word order would be “I cannot venture through all the lands.” The translator adopts an object-fronting inversion structure common in classical English poetry: “Venture through all the lands, I cannot.” This greatly enhances the literary quality and sense of desolation. Placing the grand goal “Venture through all the lands” first and ending with the short “I cannot” creates a tonal drop and sense of frustration, vividly embodying the old man’s powerlessness and sigh in the face of the vast world. This syntax inherently carries an epic and tragic color in English culture, fitting the original context very well. For terms like “三界六道” and “四洲,” deeply rooted in specific cultural systems, the translator adopts a strategy of “sacrificing form for meaning,” foregoing

the external form of the terms to preserve their internal philosophical scale and referential meaning (i.e., “everything,” “the whole world”). This is crucial for readers unfamiliar with Buddhist culture, preventing them from being deterred or confused by unfamiliar nouns and allowing them to directly access the core idea of the discourse.

#### Example 2

ST: 去了趟南海也不见长进。

TT: **Serving Guanyin** didn't help him much.

“去了趟南海 (Went to the South Sea)” in the source text is a highly culture-loaded expression. In Chinese culture, especially within the context of *Journey to the West*, “南海 (South Sea)” is a metonym for Mount Potalaka, the bodhimaṇḍa of Guanyin (Avalokiteśvara) Bodhisattva. Therefore, “going to the South Sea” does not refer to the geographical South China Sea, but is a metaphorical way of saying “going to visit/seek help from Guanyin Bodhisattva.” The target text handles this as “Serving Guanyin.” The translator completely moves away from the geographical concept of “South Sea” and directly points to the core figure (Guanyin Bodhisattva) and the action (serving) that this location represents. This captures the essential connotation of the phrase. “去了趟 (Went for a trip to)” is a very vague action—it could be visiting, seeking help, or handling affairs. The target text specifies it as “Serving,” which aligns well with the relationship between Sun Wukong and Guanyin in *Journey to the West*, precisely defining the nature of their interaction and providing more information than a literal translation of “went to.” The translator chooses to transliterate and retain “Guanyin” rather than domesticating it into a Western cultural equivalent like “Virgin Mary” or some goddess. This approach both preserves the cultural characteristic and clearly indicates through the context that “Guanyin” is a deity of high status who requires “serving.” This is crucial for introducing Chinese cultural elements. For Western players unfamiliar with Chinese culture, “South Sea” is a purely geographical term, potentially confusing: “Why would going to a sea make someone improve?” By retaining the transliterated name “Guanyin” and placing it within a clear contextual relationship (a deity who is served), the translation successfully introduces the core Chinese deity “Guanyin Bodhisattva” to Western readers in an “authentic” manner.

## 4.2 Substitutive Translation

Substitutive translation refers to the strategy where, when source language content lacks a direct equivalent in the target language, the translator selects an expression in the target culture that has an equivalent function, pragmatic effect, or emotional impact for replacement. This strategy does not pursue literal or imagery correspondence but focuses on achieving dynamic equivalence in communicative function. It is particularly suitable for colloquialisms, idioms, proverbs, and other expressions with strong cultural color and pragmatic function. Its core is “function first,” using expressions familiar to target language readers that can elicit equivalent psychological reactions, replacing unfamiliar expressions in the source language that might cause confusion or misreading.

#### Example 3

ST: 你权当是挣个**傍身的手段**罢。

TT: Anyway, just consider it **an ace up your sleeve**.

“傍身的手段 (bàngshēn de shǒuduàn)” is a Chinese idiom meaning “a skill or method one can rely on for livelihood,

ensuring personal safety or life.” It emphasizes something practical, useful in critical moments, and capable of providing a sense of security—a form of capital or ability. The translator completely abandons the literal meaning of “ 傍身 (rely on the body)” and “ 手段 (means)” because a literal translation (e.g., a means to rely on) would sound stiff, abstract, and lose the idiomatic flavor entirely. “An ace up one’s sleeve” is an extremely common and idiomatic English expression meaning “a secret trump card” or “a killer move.” Its function is almost entirely equivalent to “ 傍身的手段 .” Any English reader seeing “an ace up your sleeve” can instantly and accurately understand its meaning. This phrase is highly recognizable in Western culture, immediately evoking concepts of “secret weapon” or “key advantage” in the reader’s mind. The translation is more vivid, specific, and visual than a literal one. It successfully transforms a relatively abstract “means” into a tangible, graspable “ace,” greatly enhancing the impact and persuasiveness of the language. Functionally, both are “secret backup means.” Emotionally, both carry a sense of security from “having something to rely on” and an advantage of “being able to surprise others at critical moments.” The translation completely replicates the psychological effect intended for the listener by the original text.

#### Example 4

ST: **大哥真是有口福。** 指不定是从哪个山头上滚下来的。正好饿着，这桃儿倒是识趣。

TT: **Well, well! Luck’s around the corner.** Seems like it just fell from a fruit tree here. Perfect timing! This peach knew I needed a snack!

“有口福 (yǒu kǒufú)” is an extremely Chinese-specific concept, meaning far more than just “good luck” or “having food.” It contains a subtle, almost philosophical layer of praise: referring to a person’s innate or fortuitous blessing and affinity for enjoying delicious food. It implies a worthy-of-envy personal trait or fortune. The target text handles it as “Luck’s around the corner.” The translator completely abandons the literal imagery of “ 口 (mouth)” and “ 福 (fortune)” because a literal translation (e.g., have mouth fortune) would utterly confuse readers. The translator extracts the core function of the term in the current context—namely, to express amazement and admiration at the other party’s good fortune in unexpectedly encountering delicious food. The translator does not translate the definition of “有口福” itself but rather the intended effect of “amazement and exclamation” that the speaker wants to achieve. “Well, well! Luck’s around the corner!” is a very natural way in English to express “Wow, you’re so lucky!”. The deeper meaning of “有口福” (affinity with delicious food) is compensated for by the entire scene (the other party picking up a peach). Although readers don’t see the word “delicious food” literally, they fully understand that this is an exclamation about “luck” triggered by “finding food.” Any English reader can immediately understand the meaning of “Luck’s around the corner” and fully comprehend that the speaker is marveling at the other’s luck. The exclamation “Well, well!” and the sentence “Luck’s around the corner!” perfectly reproduce the slightly bantering, surprised, and envious tone of the original in terms of tone and rhythm, reading very naturally and idiomatically. Furthermore, this translation has universality. Whether it’s because of picking a peach, winning a restaurant coupon, or a friend suddenly treating, this sentence can be used to express amazement, making it more widely applicable than a literal translation.

### 4.3 Creative Translation

Creative translation refers to the strategy where, based on a deep understanding of the spirit, style, and context of the source text, the translator breaks free from the formal constraints of the original and engages in bold reconstruction,

recreation, or even perspective shift. This strategy is often used for poetry, highly rhetorical dialogue, or highly condensed cultural expressions. Its purpose is not only to convey basic information but also to recreate the literary beauty, dramatic tension, character personality, or philosophical depth of the original in the target language. Its core is “reconstruction and representation,” allowing the translator to mobilize the literary traditions and rhetorical resources of the target language for artistic recreation.

#### Example 5

ST: 再不知深浅地这么往前硬闯，只怕得吃大苦头。

TT: **Wait! You don't think** you can just parade in, **do you? It's not that simple!**

The source text is a third-person narrative or warning. The target text is completely transformed into first-person direct dialogue. An opening word, “Wait!” is added, and it is converted into two highly impactful, rhetorical and negative questions. This reconstruction makes the warning extremely direct, vivid, and full of dramatic conflict. The source text is a declarative sentence stating consequences, while the core of the target text is an idiomatic English negative question (“You don’t think..., do you?”) used rhetorically, questioning and negating the listener’s assumption. The use of this rhetorical question is a stroke of genius in the translation, achieving several functions: It directly targets the listener (“you”), creating a sense of tension, and visually depicts face-to-face conflict. This tone is much more powerful than directly saying “Your idea is wrong,” greatly enhancing the character’s expressiveness and conveying a tone of sarcasm and disbelief. The tone of mockery, anxiety, and warning conveyed through the idiomatic rhetorical and negative sentence structure is stronger and more direct than the declarative sentence of the original. It better suits the way characters speak in high-intensity dramatic conflicts, sounding more like a real exchange between characters rather than a written warning, maximizing the tone and emotional intensity. The source text “吃大苦头 (suffer great hardship)” is an affirmative statement, directly predicting a specific negative outcome (will be in big trouble). The target text “It’s not that simple!” is a negative statement, negating a false premise in the listener’s assumption (that it is simple). “吃大苦头” is a Chinese-specific expression carrying the imagery of “suffering pain and tribulation.” A literal translation (e.g., you will suffer greatly) might seem overly dramatic or even clichéd to Western audiences.

In contrast, “It’s not that simple” is a completely neutral, universally applicable philosophical statement. It does not rely on any culture-specific imagery of suffering but appeals to a universal truth—“the world is more complex than you think.” This avoids any cultural discount and ensures all audiences can understand it unconditionally. Western culture, particularly Anglo-Saxon culture, values rationality, critical thinking, and personal judgment. This mode of expression is more psychologically acceptable to Western audiences, potentially having a better deterrent effect, aligning better with Western individualistic and rational cultural psychology.

#### Example 6

S T: 走走走，游游游，甘为铜钱做马牛。做人哪比做妖好，不怕阎王命不休。

T T: On the go, bent the toe, Life of human, all for gold. Nowhere better than our home, We cheat death and ever grow.

The source text is a four-line folk verse with seven characters per line, rhyming on “游 (yóu - roam)”, “牛 (niú - ox)”,

“好 (hǎo - good)”, “休 (xiū - cease)”, and has a brisk rhythm. The target text successfully recreates the poetic form, adopting a quatrain structure and creating an AABB rhyme scheme (toe/go, gold/grow—note: ‘gold’ and ‘grow’ form an approximate rhyme/half-rhyme). This ensures the translation, like the original, is catchy and readable aloud. The translation uses alliteration (e.g., “go” and “gold”, “bent” and “better”), enhancing the musicality of the language and compensating for the phonological beauty of the original Chinese poem. “走走走, 游游游” depicts a state of free, unfettered wandering. The translation does not literally translate “walk” or “roam,” but uses the idiomatic phrase “on the go” (busy, moving constantly) to capture the essence of “constant movement.” “Bent the toe” is a highly creative translation; it sacrifices literal meaning but vividly depicts the image of toiling until one’s toes are bent from striving for a livelihood, perfectly echoing the next line “做马牛 (be horses and oxen).” For the line “甘为铜钱做马牛,” the translator adopts a macro perspective shift. The original is “Willing to be... for...”, while the translation elevates it to “Life of human, all for gold.” “Gold” replaces “copper coins,” a successful domestication of the cultural image, as “gold” is the most direct and classic symbol of wealth in English culture. “做人哪比做妖好” directly contrasts “human” with “demon/monster (妖 yāo).” Aware of the heavy cultural load and negative connotations of “妖” (direct translation as monster/demon would bring completely negative associations), the translator completely moves away from this framework and captures the deep emotion behind the line: a sense of belonging and pride in the current identity and group. Using “our home” to refer to “the community/world of demons” is a brilliant metaphor. It transforms the negative meaning of “being a demon” into a positive, warm, belongingness-filled meaning, extremely easily resonating with readers. “不怕阎王 (Not afraid of Yama)” in the last line means fearing no death. The translation “cheat death” is an extremely idiomatic and powerful English expression, perfectly conveying the arrogance and delight of “defeating death, escaping death,” even possessing more action and rebellious spirit than “not afraid.” “Ever grow” is a positive recreation that goes beyond the passive state of “命不休 (life doesn’t end)” in the original, actively expressing the power and eternity of “demons,” greatly enhancing the character’s momentum and the poem’s closing strength. The translation unifies the perspective into the first-person plural “we” and “our,” strengthening the sense of group identity and the declarative force, making the poem more like an anthem or slogan for a group (the demon community), thus enhancing its communicative effect. The translator cleverly avoids culture-loaded terms like “妖” and “阎王 (Yama)” that could easily be misunderstood negatively in Western culture, instead extracting their core functions (belongingness, transcending death) and replacing them with the most potent and idiomatic expressions in the target culture. This ensures that target readers can not only understand but also be emotionally moved by the poem. The translation successfully endows a Chinese folk verse with an idiomatic English poetic appearance. Its rhythm, rhyme, and diction conform to the norms of English poetry, reading without any sense of incongruity.

## 5 Conclusion

As a popular game carrying profound Chinese cultural connotations, the subtitle translation of *Black Myth: Wukong* is not only about the accuracy of language conversion but also a practice and challenge of intercultural communication. Based on intercultural communication theory and considering the differences between high- and low-context cultures, this paper analyzed various text types in the game, such as culture-loaded words, idioms, and poetry, finding that the translators demonstrated high cultural sensitivity and creativity in handling Buddhist terms, mythological imagery, and colloquial expressions.

The research indicates that successful game subtitle translation requires finding a balance between “foreignization” and “domestication,” and between “literal translation” and “liberal translation.” It must both preserve the uniqueness

and heterogeneity of the source culture and ensure barrier-free comprehension and emotional resonance for target language players. Through strategies like explanatory translation, functional equivalence, cultural substitution, and creative reconstruction, the translators effectively achieved the transmission of cultural meaning and the representation of character personalities, enhancing the game's narrative immersion and cross-cultural acceptability.

As Chinese games advance further into the world, cross-cultural translation research should pay more attention to player perspective feedback, the synergy of multimodal contexts, and the application of AI-assisted translation, promoting the professionalization and internationalization of Chinese game subtitle translation to a higher level, providing strong support for the global dissemination of Chinese culture.

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