

# ALGORITHMIC TRANSLATION AND GLOBAL DISSEMINATION OF CHINESE VERNACULAR LITERATURE

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## Abstract

This article examines the translation and dissemination strategies of Chinese native (local color) literature in the global context, with particular attention to its cross-cultural adaptability. The study first reviews the dilemmas of the early translation stage (circa the 1920s), then analyzes how translators in the 21st century have achieved the reconstruction of geographical and spiritual spaces through multi-dimensional mechanisms, including retention, attenuation, and supplementation, enabling culture-loaded terms from the source text to resonate with target-language readers. In contemporary scholarship, research perspectives have shifted from pure textual comparison toward reception aesthetics and eco-translation studies, exploring translator cultural identity and the hermeneutic circle in pursuit of maximal meaning equivalence. This article further introduces an algorithmic translation strategy, taking TikTok as a primary example. Drawing on empirical analysis of TikTok platform data collected via TikTok Scraper, the study proposes that subtitle translation on short-video platforms must coordinate linguistic symbols with visual and auditory effects while embedding algorithm-sensitive keywords to enhance content recommendation weight. These findings reflect the cross-cultural adaptation process of local color literature, from linguistic scarcity to aesthetic reproduction to translator subjectivity, and mirror the diversification of global literary reception mechanisms.

**Keywords:** *algorithmic translation, Chinese native literature, local color literature, cross-cultural dissemination, TikTok, translation strategies*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The countryside of China is widely regarded as the root and soul of the nation (Wang, 2024). Writing about the local land carries a distinctive mystique, alienation, and shock value. Local color literature, saturated with hospitality, wisdom, authenticity, and wildness, is not only a product of the people's reverence for the land but also reflects the simplicity inherent in the hearts of other peoples and races. As a literary genre, local color literature is inherently intertwined with regional culture, folk traditions, and social-historical contexts (Asadchykh et al., 2025).

During the early translation phase (around the 1920s), the international dissemination of Chinese local color literature primarily relied on the efforts of individual translators (Qiufen et al., 2025). Early English translations of Lu Xun's *The*

True Story of Ah Q maintained high linguistic fidelity; however, excessive literalism hindered fluent reading for English audiences, thereby limiting Western reception. In the 21st century, following the global success of Mo Yan's *Red Sorghum*, Howard Goldblatt's translation became regarded as a paragon of English rendering for local color literature. Research indicates that Goldblatt employed a multidimensional translation mechanism, encompassing retention, attenuation, and supplementation (Sherlock et al., 2023), when reconstructing geographic and spiritual spaces, enabling culturally loaded terms from the source text to resonate with target-language readers.

In contemporary scholarship (the 2000s to present), foreign academia has gradually shifted its research perspective from pure textual comparison to reception aesthetics and eco-translation studies (Dasca & Cerarols, 2024). Scholars not only examine translation strategies but also explore the profound impact of the translator's cultural identity. They attempt to elucidate the translator's choices and compromises through a hermeneutic cycle. Achieving absolute stylistic equivalence in works such as *Red Sorghum* is considered nearly impossible (Fang, 2024); translators often pursue maximal meaning equivalence, recreating the original's local flavor by coining neologisms or appropriately omitting certain elements (Sabrina et al., 2025).

In summary, foreign studies on local color literature demonstrate a distinct spatio-temporal layering: from early linguistic scarcity to modern aesthetic reproduction, and further to contemporary analyses of translator subjectivity and ecological niche. This trajectory reflects not only the cross-cultural adaptation process of local color literature itself but also the diversified evolution of global literary reception mechanisms.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Rural literature as a specific style first emerged in the 1920s and 1930s. Italian writer Giovanni Verga (1840–1922) authentically depicted the hardships of the lower classes (Rossi, 2023), propelling the rural novel to a period of flourishing development. In a narrow sense, rural literature refers to works with distinct local colors and cultural inclinations (Tang & Xu, 2023); in a broader sense, it encompasses works focusing on rural life, homesickness, and local customs and sentiments (Mao et al., 2024).

Chinese sociologist Xiaotong Fei highlighted from a sociological perspective that the core of rural literature lies in the cultural memory of agrarian civilization, characterized by attachment to the land, familial ethical relations, and local knowledge (Sinha & Lakhanpal, 2022). These viewpoints have broadened the theoretical dimensions of rural literature, establishing it as a crucial entry point for studying literary works and social transformations. In terms of linguistic style, rural literature exhibits a

strong sense of regional distinctiveness (Chen, 2023). Authors of rural literature often employ local dialects, folk sayings, and colloquial expressions to shape the localness of their texts, while cultural symbols such as marriage and funeral customs, land deity worship, and traditional crafts are frequently incorporated into narratives.

The development of Chinese local color literature translation can be traced across four main stages. During the Early Stage (early 1920s), modern Chinese literature began to be introduced to the West (Chan et al., 2023). Translation strategies during this period were relatively simplistic and often served missionary or propagandist purposes. Translators tended toward literal approaches that preserved the original's straightforwardness but often lacked fluency, resulting in limited Western acceptance.

During the Development Stage (1940s–1970s), local color literature became a tool for cultural struggle. Eileen Chang's *The Rice-Sprout Song* (1955) exemplifies how translators had to balance retaining the original's critical spark with catering to Western market expectations (Zhao & Zhang, 2025), often resulting in revisions to satisfy sponsors' political demands. Goldblatt subsequently attempted to reduce the exoticism of Chinese local color culture through fluent English, a domestication strategy that, while broadening accessibility, sometimes diluted the original's wild aesthetic.

In the Contemporary Stage (2000s–present), the translation of local color literature entered a phase that equally emphasizes ontology and reception aesthetics (Claramonte, 2022). International scholars have applied Jauss's Reception Aesthetics to assess translation success. Significant untranslatability challenges remain, heavily dependent on dialects and graphic imagery. Research on local color literature has correspondingly shifted from a text-centric to a reader-centric approach (Padmaja & Rajmohan, 2023). Contemporary scholarship stresses foreignization and the retention of cultural load words as essential to preserving the uniqueness of local color literature, while acknowledging that successful translation requires not only linguistic balance but also resonance with target culture readers (Қожабаева et al., 2024). In a global comparative context, Western local color literature (such as Southern American literature) and Chinese local color literature show significant differences that underscore the risk of cultural misinterpretation during translation.

### 3. ANALYSIS

#### 3.1 *Challenges and Difficulties in Translating Local Color Literature*

Translating local color literature has long been considered a challenging area in cross-cultural communication due to its cultural specificity. Lawrence Venuti emphasizes in *The Translator's Invisibility* that the dense cultural symbols in local texts

constitute the core source of untranslatability. Translation challenges are primarily reflected in two dimensions.

The first is the conversion dilemma of Chinese local language and colloquial expressions. The language of local literature often deviates from standard language norms. Eugene Nida's advocacy for functional equivalence, using target-language forms to correspond to source-language meanings, remains influential; however, pseudo-equivalence may distort the sociolinguistic connotation of the original text.

The second challenge is the semantic loss of culture-loaded terms. Chinese local literature involves a large number of specialized terms related to farming tools, festivals, and folk beliefs that often lack direct equivalents in the target language. While Christiane Nord's cultural substitution and graphic explanation strategy provides one solution, anthropologist Clifford Geertz cautions that explanatory translation may dissolve the thick description of cultural concepts, leaving readers with only a superficial understanding rather than genuine comprehension of ritual significance.

To understand audience acceptance of local and folk literature on algorithmic platforms, this study retrieved video data using the keywords village and dialect on TikTok Scraper. Relevant videos were downloaded and processed to extract user metadata including follower counts, following counts, total profile likes, unique IDs, verification status, and post-level engagement metrics (likes, bookmarks, and comments). The data were subsequently visualized using Python, as presented in Figures 1–8.

## **3.2 Platform Data Analysis**

### **3.2.1 Follower Distribution**

The follower count histogram reveals a pronounced right-skewed distribution consistent with a power-law pattern. The vast majority of users maintain relatively low follower counts, while a minority possesses a substantially larger following, an instance of heavy-tailed distribution. This aligns with the Preferential Attachment mechanism described in network science, whereby new users tend to follow creators who already have high follower counts, producing a compounding inequality. TikTok's interest-based recommendation algorithm (the For You Page) further amplifies this effect: certain users experience exponential growth through algorithmic amplification, while most ordinary creators struggle to overcome growth bottlenecks.

### **3.2.2 Following Count and Follower Count**

The scatter plot of following count versus follower count, displayed on a log-log scale with a LOWESS trend line, reveals a weak overall correlation between the two

variables. Users who follow many accounts do not necessarily acquire large followings. In the low following count range ( $< 100$ ), follower counts fluctuate considerably but remain relatively high, suggesting that audience growth in this range is driven by content quality rather than reciprocal follows. In the medium range (100–1,000), the trend line flattens. In the extremely high range ( $> 1,000$ ), follower counts may even decline, possibly because excessive following reduces personal content recommendation weight. This non-reciprocity indicates that TikTok's algorithm privileges content quality over social connectivity, rendering the follow-for-follow strategy largely ineffective on this platform.

### 3.2.3 Follower Count and Total Likes

The log-log plot of follower count versus total profile likes reveals a significant positive correlation consistent with a power-law growth pattern. The Matthew Effect is clearly operative: accounts with larger followings receive disproportionately higher total likes. The LOWESS regression curve indicates that for low-follower users, likes growth is relatively slow (limited exposure); in the medium-follower range, likes grow rapidly with follower count; while in the high-follower range, growth decelerates, potentially reflecting decreased fan activity or reduced marginal exposure. Notably, low-follower users exhibit scattered likes distributions, indicating that TikTok's recommendation algorithm can still generate significant traffic even for smaller accounts, a feature that differentiates TikTok from connection-driven networks.

### 3.2.4 Interaction Data Distribution

Interaction data (likes, saves, and comments) exhibits a pronounced right skew forming a heavy-tailed distribution, confirming that TikTok user interaction aligns with a power-law distribution in which a small number of top creators garner the majority of interactions. Likes substantially exceed saves and comments in magnitude, indicating that liking is the most common and lowest-cost interaction behavior. The low correlation between saves and comments ( $r \approx 0.5$ ) suggests that these behaviors are driven by different motivations: saves are associated with knowledge-based or in-depth content, while commenting is driven more by emotional response and topic popularity. For creators, the volume of likes alone does not reflect high-quality audience stickiness; comments and saves are more indicative of deep content engagement.

### 3.2.5 Correlation of Interaction Metrics

A Pearson correlation heat map reveals that likes and saves exhibit a high correlation ( $r = 0.97$ ), indicating that users frequently like content they also save for future reference, a pattern particularly pronounced in informational or tutorial videos. Likes and comments show a lower correlation ( $r = 0.64$ ), reflecting the higher cognitive

and emotional investment required for commenting relative to liking. The lowest correlation is observed between saves and comments ( $r \approx 0.5$ ): saving behavior is associated with knowledge-oriented content consumption, whereas commenting is driven more by emotional engagement and controversial or discussion-rich topics.

### 3.2.6 Verified vs. Non-Verified Users

Box plot analysis reveals that verified users' median likes count (121K) far surpasses that of non-verified users (26K). Verified users benefit from larger follower bases, stronger brand recognition, and potentially greater algorithmic recommendation support. However, non-verified users display more extreme outliers, some exceeding 6 million likes, demonstrating that viral content can propel even unverified creators to mass exposure. The verified user distribution is more stable and concentrated, reflecting consistent content quality, whereas non-verified user performance is more dependent on individual popular videos.

### 3.2.7 Video Posting Time and Average Likes

Analysis of average likes by posting time identifies 19:00 (7 PM) as the peak engagement period, aligning with post-work relaxation and leisure browsing. A secondary peak appears at 5:00–6:00 AM, possibly attributable to content accumulating overnight interactions or specific audience segments (e.g., international users or night-shift workers). Likes are relatively low during the 7:00–9:00 AM commuting window. A sharp decline after 20:00–22:00 suggests reduced platform use as audiences transition to other leisure activities. Significant hour-to-hour fluctuations indicate that occasional viral videos can substantially elevate average likes in specific time slots.

### 3.2.8 Audience Profile Analysis

Word cloud analysis of user bios in the dataset reveals several salient themes. Follow, Support, Subscribe, and Join are the most frequently occurring terms, indicating active audience cultivation strategies. Cross-platform references are common, particularly to YouTube, Instagram, Discord, and Patreon, reflecting creators' multi-platform operation patterns. Content category terms including Beauty, Fashion, Lifestyle, Gaming, Travel, Village Life, and Food reflect the dominant niches within this dataset. Language-related terms (Arabic, German, Linguistics, Dialect) confirm the prominence of language learning content, corroborating the study's focus on dialect-related material. Geographic markers (UK, China, Seattle, Paris) suggest that local cultural identity is frequently foregrounded in creator self-presentation.

## 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 4.1 Translation Variation Strategies

#### 4.1.1 Algorithm-Oriented Translation: Combining Pragmatic Equivalence with Algorithmic Approaches

On algorithm-driven platforms, taking TikTok as a primary example, translation must achieve not only functional linguistic equivalence but also the synergistic coordination of linguistic symbols with non-linguistic elements such as visuals and sound effects. Based on the platform data analysis presented in Section 3, content dissemination on TikTok exhibits a pronounced power-law distribution in which a small number of top creators capture the majority of traffic. This implies that translation strategy should prioritize keyword optimization to enhance the algorithmic recommendation weight of content.

#### Keyword Embedding

When translating content related to 'country' and 'dialect,' embedding popular keywords from the target language, such as regional culture, dialect challenge, and hometown accent, is recommended. For example, translating 'Explore dialects from different countries' as 'Discover global local languages and take on your hometown dialect challenge' preserves the core information of the source text while incorporating algorithm-sensitive keywords. Table 1 presents a systematic framework of methods for identifying popular keywords in the target language.

Category	Method	Operation	Example
1. In-Platform Tools	1.1 TikTok Discover Page	Browse trending topics, challenges, and keywords to identify popular terms in the target language.	If a local dialect challenge appears on the Discover Page, embed those keywords in translations.
	1.2 Creator Marketplace	Use TikTok's analytics tools to identify keywords with high search volume and engagement rates.	If regional culture has high search volume, prioritize those terms in translations.
	1.3 Video Analytics	Analyze top creator data to identify which keywords have driven high engagement.	If a dialect challenge keyword achieved high engagement, embed it in similar translations.
2. Third-Party Tools	2.1 Google Trends	Check search trends for dialect- and region-related keywords by language and geography.	If local dialect culture is rising in the target language, embed this keyword accordingly.

	2.2 Social Media Monitoring (e.g., Hootsuite, Brandwatch)	Monitor trending topics and keywords across social media in the target language.	If regional slang frequently trends, embed it in translations.
	2.3 Keyword Research Tools (e.g., Ahrefs, SEMrush)	Assess search volume, competition, and related keywords for key terms.	If regional culture has high volume but low competition, prioritize embedding it.
3. Cultural Alignment	3.1 Cultural Hotspots and Holidays	Identify which keywords gain popularity during culturally significant periods in the target market.	During holidays when target audiences focus on local dialect, embed relevant terms.

*Table 1. Methods for identifying popular keywords in the target language.*

### Localized Expressions

Beyond keyword embedding, translation should leverage the cultural habits of the target language through localized expressions. Localized expressions enhance content affinity and engagement. Table 2 presents specific methods for achieving localized expressions in practice.

Method	Operation	Example
2.1 Research cultural background	Gain in-depth understanding of the target culture's history, customs, and popular trends.	Translate 'Discover the beauty of rural life' as 'Unveil the Charm of Countryside Life' rather than a literal equivalent.
2.2 Follow popular expressions	Learn current internet slang and popular expressions through social media, news, and films.	Translate 'Explore dialects from different countries' as 'Discover Global Dialects: Challenge Your Hometown Language.'
2.3 Refer to successful cases	Study high-engagement localization examples in the target language.	If 'Unveil Dialects of Sichuan, China' achieved high engagement, apply comparable expressions to similar content.
2.4 Interact with local users	Engage target-language users to understand their language habits and preferences.	If users prefer 'dialect challenge' over 'dialect exploration,' prioritize challenge in translations.

2.5 Use localization tools	Consult localization dictionaries, cultural guides, and localization platforms.	Use Linguee or Reverso to look up common target-language expressions.
2.6 Conduct A/B testing	Create multiple localized versions and identify which drives higher engagement.	Test 'Discover Chinese Dialects' against 'Unveil China's Regional Culture' and select the better-performing version.

*Table 2. Methods for achieving localized expressions in translation.*

## Keyword Density Optimization

When translating video titles, descriptions, and subtitles, keywords should be distributed appropriately so that the algorithm can efficiently identify the content topic. On algorithm-driven platforms, the 'functional equivalence' of translation encompasses not only linguistic functions but also algorithmic recommendation functions. Table 3 presents specific methods for keyword density optimization.

Method	Operation	Example
3.1 Identify core keywords	Determine core keywords based on the content theme, for dialect/rural content, these include regional culture, dialect challenge, and hometown slang.	For 'Join me to explore the dialects of China,' core keywords are Chinese dialects and regional culture.
3.2 Distribute keywords strategically	Place keywords with higher density in titles and descriptions; distribute them more sparsely in subtitles.	Title: 'Join me to uncover Chinese dialects'; description: 'Discover dialects across China, experience the unique charm of regional culture.'
3.3 Avoid keyword stuffing	Ensure content remains natural and fluent while incorporating keywords.	Use 'Join me to uncover Chinese dialects' rather than simply 'Chinese Dialects' to maintain fluency.
3.4 Use density analysis tools	Use tools such as Yoast SEO or SEMrush to verify keyword density stays within 2%–3%.	Check that Sichuan dialects and regional culture appear in titles, descriptions, and subtitles without excessive repetition.
3.5 Align with algorithm mechanisms	Understand TikTok's recommendation priorities and include algorithmically favored keywords.	Translate 'Explore the dialects of different regions' as 'Discover local dialects around the world, challenge your language skills.'

*Table 3. Methods for keyword density optimization in algorithmic translation.*

### ***4.1.2 Simplifying Language to Improve Algorithm Recognition Efficiency***

Platform data indicate that TikTok user engagement is dominated by likes, with comments and saves requiring higher cognitive and emotional thresholds. This pattern indicates that users prefer fast, intuitive content. Translation should therefore simplify language to ensure rapid algorithm identification of content topics, combining the 'principle of conciseness' from pragmatic translation studies with the 'rapid recognition' mechanism of algorithmic recommendations.

Specific strategies include: (1) Sentence Simplification, translating complex descriptions into clear, concise equivalents while preserving core messages (e.g., 'This video will take you on a journey to explore the unique dialects of different regions' becomes 'Follow, find your dialect'); (2) Information Focusing, centering core information and eliminating redundant content to enhance intuitiveness; and (3) Algorithm-Sensitive Vocabulary, incorporating terms such as challenge, discover, and explore to increase recommendation weight.

### ***4.1.3 Cultural Symbol Re-creation***

Translation variation theory emphasizes creative transformation in the translation process. Literal translation frequently fails to convey the deep meanings of source culture in cross-cultural communication contexts. Building on the TikTok Scraper data analysis, three primary strategies are proposed.

**Symbolic Re-creation of Local Language and Culture:** When translating content related to local languages, converting local language features of the source culture into culturally resonant equivalents in the target culture enhances target user acceptance. For example, 'This dialect is so funny' may be rendered as 'This rustic dialect is hilarious, truly the meme king of local vernacular,' enhancing appeal through cultural symbol re-creation. Additional depth can be added: 'This dialect is unique to this region' becomes 'This native dialect serves as a unique cultural symbol of the region, embodying profound historical heritage.'

**Symbolic Substitution and Fusion of Regional Culture:** When translating content related to 'country,' regional symbols from the source culture may be replaced with culturally similar symbols in the target culture to enhance immersion. For example, 'Explore the countryside of France' may be rendered as 'Explore the French countryside and experience pastoral charm.' Similarly, in-depth cultural interpretation and integration with target culture can substantially improve dissemination effectiveness.

#### ***4.1.4 Combination of Pragmatic Presupposition Translation and User Guidance***

Presupposition theory in pragmatic translation studies emphasizes that translation must account for the audience's background knowledge and expectations. On a highly interactive platform such as TikTok, translation can leverage users' presupposed psychology to guide interaction behavior, building on the platform data analysis presented in Section 3.

Presupposing Users' Interactive Psychology: Translation should be designed around three dimensions of presupposition. (1) Curiosity presupposition: 'Follow me to explore dialects' becomes 'Click follow and discover your hometown dialect.' (2) Participation presupposition: 'What's your favorite dialect?' becomes 'What's your favorite local language? Tell me in the comments!' (3) Emotional resonance presupposition: 'This dialect reminds me of home' becomes 'This local language reminds me of home. What about you?'

Embedding Interaction Guidance: Given the power-law distribution of engagement on TikTok, translation should enhance users' desire to participate by embedding interactive language, designing interactive questions, and formulating guided interactive challenges. These strategies directly address the engagement asymmetry documented in the platform data, encouraging behaviors (comments, saves) that signal deeper content engagement rather than merely incremental likes.

## **5. CONCLUSION**

This article has examined the translation and dissemination strategies of Chinese local color literature in the global context from three perspectives: historical development, translation challenges, and algorithmic innovation. The historical review traces a trajectory from early linguistic scarcity, through aesthetic reproduction in the mid-century period, to contemporary concerns with translator subjectivity and ecological translation theory. Translation challenges, including the conversion of colloquial expressions, the semantic loss of culture-loaded terms, and the limits of stylistic equivalence, remain central to the field.

The empirical analysis of TikTok platform data provides an evidence base for the proposed algorithmic translation strategy. Content dissemination on algorithmic platforms follows a pronounced power-law distribution, placing a premium on keyword optimization, localized expression, and user guidance mechanisms. The proposed framework, combining keyword embedding, density optimization, cultural symbol recreation, and pragmatic presupposition strategies, represents a systematic approach to

maximizing the recommendation weight and cross-cultural resonance of translated content on short-video platforms.

These findings suggest that algorithmic translation constitutes a distinct mode of translation practice that extends beyond traditional frameworks of functional equivalence or foreignization/domestication. The translation unit in this context is not merely the sentence or text but the full multimodal package, linguistic, visual, auditory, and algorithmic, that determines whether content reaches and resonates with its intended audience. Future research should examine how these strategies perform across different linguistic pairs, platform architectures, and content categories, and should explore the ethical implications of embedding commercial keywords within literary translation practice.

## Declarations

**Availability of data and materials:** The datasets used and/or analyzed during the current study are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

**Conflict of interest:** The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

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