

From Cultural Translation to Digital Bricolage: A Seven-Language Study of Global Reinterpretations of Chinese Music on YouTube

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates how global audiences reinterpret Chinese music through cultural translation and creative adaptation in digital spaces. Using a text analysis by Python and KH Coder, it analyzes multilingual YouTube comments on 23 popular Chinese music videos, covering traditional, opera, and patriotic genres. Findings reveal that audiences rely on nonlinguistic elements —melody, instruments, and visual symbolism—to bridge cultural gaps, with emotional resonance and hybrid compositions facilitating interpretation, while linguistic barriers spur creative misreadings. The study proposes a model of cultural bricolage with three key forms. First, interpretive bricolage involves reimagining traditional symbols in modern digital contexts, such as memes or gaming culture. Second, narrative bricolage repurposes patriotic songs to express political dissent, reflecting tensions between global platforms and national narratives. Third, political bricolage blends local meanings with global themes, framing music through universal or historical perspectives. Three contextual factors shape these practices. Cultural capital, such as prior exposure to Chinese media, influences interpretation. Algorithmic recommendations amplify certain musical features, steering trends. Meanwhile, influencers play a key role in legitimizing specific interpretations. The study highlights how digital spaces enable audiences to creatively reshape cultural meanings beyond their original context.

Keywords: algorithmic mediation; cross-cultural communication; cultural bricolage; digital platforms; music reception