



## A Translation Study of the Meaning and Aesthetics of Drama Subtitles of When We Were Young (人不彪悍枉少年) as Literary Works on WeTV Channel Indonesia: A Review of Literary Translation Theory

Sheyra Silvia Siregar<sup>1✉</sup>, Ria Riski Marsuki<sup>2</sup>, Sheyla Silvia Siregar<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Universitas Negeri Semarang, Indonesia

<sup>2</sup> Universitas Negeri Semarang, Indonesia

<sup>3</sup> Universitas Negeri Jakarta, Indonesia

### Keywords

*Chinese Drama, Audiovisual Translation, Chinese Idioms, Metaphors in Translation, Subtitle Limitations*

### Abstract

This study aims to analyze the translation of the meaning and aesthetics of the subtitles of the drama When We Were Young (人不彪悍枉少年) aired on the YouTube channel WeTV Indonesia, as well as discuss the translation of this drama as a literary work. The main focus of this study is to understand how the translator overcame linguistic and cultural challenges in translating the dialog-drama which is full of Chinese idioms and cultural expressions into Indonesian. This research uses a descriptive qualitative approach with a case study design to analyze the subtitle texts. The data used are purposively selected drama subtitles from several episodes that contain idiomatic and metaphorical elements. Literary translation theories, such as equivalence theory by Nida (1964), domestication vs. foreignization theory by Venuti (1995), and audiovisual translation theory by Gottlieb (1994), are applied in this analysis to explore how translators balance between fidelity to the source text and the limitations of subtitle space. The study found that translators often adopt a domestication approach to ease the understanding of Indonesian audiences, while still trying to maintain the original aesthetics and cultural nuances of the source text. The findings make an important contribution to the study of literary translation, especially in the context of audiovisual translation which requires attention to linguistic and cultural aspects simultaneously.

✉ Corresponding Author:  
E-mail: sheyra89@mail.unnes.ac.id

## INTRODUCTION

In the past decade, the dissemination of television dramas through digital platforms has seen a significant increase, especially with the advent of social media and streaming apps such as YouTube, WeTV, and others.

Television dramas, particularly those from China, such as *When We Were Young* (人不彪悍枉少年), have become part of global cultural consumption. The drama attracted the attention of international audiences, including Indonesia, because of its relevant themes of friendship and youthful self-discovery. *When We Were Young* is an example of how dramas from foreign cultures can be accepted and enjoyed by global audiences, including through subtitles provided in various languages.

The subtitles of these dramas play a very important role in connecting the audience with the original texts, which often contain cultural and social elements that are very typical of the country of origin, China. The process of translating subtitles is more than just replacing words in the original language with equivalents in the target language. The translation of subtitles must also consider the cultural elements, social context, as well as the aesthetic aspects contained in the work. Therefore, this study focuses on the translation of the meaning and aesthetics of the subtitles of the drama *When We Were Young* on the YouTube channel WeTV Indonesia as a literary work, with a review approach of literary translation theory.

Subtitle translation includes not only language transfer, but also cultural and aesthetic transfer from the source text to the target text. In the context of the drama *When We Were Young*, subtitle translation requires the translator to deal with more than just the linguistic text. The play contains literary elements in the form of idioms, metaphors and ways of thinking that are heavily influenced by Chinese culture. Therefore, the translation process must consider the meaning and aesthetic aspects contained in each dialog.

One of the main challenges in subtitle translation is the limited space and time available on screen. The translator must be able to communicate the essence of the dialog in a very short time, without compromising the meaning or emotion. In this case, subtitle translation becomes a skill that involves more than just linguistic techniques, but also a deep understanding of the literary work and the culture behind the text.

### **Chinese Drama as Audiovisual Literature**

*When We Were Young* (人不彪悍枉少年) is a drama rich with literary and cultural elements. It tells a story of youth, friendship, and the search for identity in the context of life in China. The play not

only presents a heartwarming story, but also reflects social values, philosophies, and culture that are very Chinese. Through its language and dialog, the play features characters who are alive with Chinese values, and every utterance and expression used contains deep meaning.

The text of the play, while touching on universal themes, is characterized by language that cannot be readily understood by foreign audiences without proper translation. The Chinese idioms used in the play contain very specific meanings and often cannot be translated literally into Indonesian. Therefore, subtitle translation plays a key role in conveying the meaning contained in the original text in a way that remains culturally appropriate and understandable to the target audience.

### **Meaning and Aesthetic Aspects in Subtitle Translation**

The translation of subtitles for the drama *When We Were Young* requires the translator to consider two main aspects: meaning and aesthetics. The meaning aspect relates to the accuracy in transferring the message that the speaker wants to convey in the source language into the target language. Meanwhile, the aesthetic aspect relates to how the text is presented in order to retain the nuances and distinctive style of the original literary work.

Aesthetics in this drama is very important because it uses language that is full of emotional and symbolic nuances. For example, dialog involving metaphors or idioms in Chinese must be translated with the aesthetic effect in mind. The translator must be able to create subtitle text that is not only meaningfully accurate but also flows well in Indonesian, retaining the beauty of the original language and its nuances.

### **METHOD**

This research method aims to analyze the translation of *When We Were Young*'s drama subtitles using relevant literary and audiovisual translation theories. Using a descriptive qualitative approach, this research will examine how the meaning and aesthetics of the drama are translated into Indonesian, as well as the cultural challenges faced by the translator. This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach to analyze the translation of subtitles of the drama *When We Were Young* (人不彪悍枉少年) available on WeTV Indonesia's YouTube channel. The qualitative approach is used because this study aims to explore the meaning and aesthetics contained in the translation of subtitles as audiovisual literary works, as well as to analyze how the translators overcome linguistic and cultural challenges through the translation process. This study also examines theories of literary translation, with the aim of providing insight into the application of theory in the translation of drama subtitles (Munday, 2016).

This research uses a case study design to explore the translation of subtitles in the drama *When We*

Were Young. This case study aims to understand how the translation process is carried out in the context of a specific drama and a specific channel (YouTube WeTV Indonesia), as well as how literary translation theory is applied in overcoming translation challenges related to meaning and aesthetics (Stake, 1995).

The data collection methods used are text analysis and documentation analysis, focusing on the subtitles translated into Indonesian. The analyzed subtitle texts will cover several episodes of the drama, focusing on dialogues containing Chinese idioms, metaphors and cultural references. Data will be collected from the official WeTV Indonesia channel on YouTube. Research Steps are describe bellow:

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Of the 8 types of translation methods proposed by Newmark (1988), this study finds that the Chinese drama “When We Were Young (人不彪悍枉少年)” by Yan Sheng and Yi Lanshan contains all eight translation methods. The following is the explanation of each method. According to Newmark (1988), word-for-word translation is a translation method that favors the source language by maintaining the sentence structure of the source language.

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As the name implies, when using this method, the translator will translate one by one the words in a sentence and arrange them according to the original order of the source language. The following are some data that use the word-for-word translation method. The first data collected by the researcher is as follows:

**Table 1.** Data Collected

Tsu	我不同意，孔老师。 ( <i>wǒ bù tóng yì, kǒng lǎo shī</i> )
Tsa	I disagree, Master Kong.

The Chinese phrase “我不同意，孔老师。” appears in a scene from the Chinese drama When We Were Young (人不彪悍枉少年), where a young character expresses his disapproval of a teacher named Kong. In the Indonesian subtitled version aired on WeTV Indonesia's YouTube channel, the line translates to “I don't agree, Teacher Kong.”

At the pragmatic level, this sentence is used to express disagreement with the opinion of someone who has a higher social status (teacher). The use of “孔老师” (*kǒng lǎoshī*) is a respectful form of greeting

that combines the surname ‘Kong’ and the social title “Laoshi” (Teacher). In translation, “Guru Kong” retains this sense of honorific, even though in Indonesian culture this structure is rarely used. This shows that the translator chose the strategy of retaining elements of the source culture (foreignization).

The aesthetic value in this sentence does not lie in the beauty of sound or poetic diction, but in the harmony of social relations in communication. The use of the greeting form “孔老师” reflects Confucian values such as respect for teachers and social hierarchy. In translation, the form “Guru Kong” still shows respect, although it feels a little stiff in the Indonesian cultural context. However, this can be considered an attempt to introduce the audience to the original cultural norms in the play.

The translation of the sentence “我不同意，孔老师” into “I disagree, Master Kong.” shows the accuracy of the denotative and connotative meanings, as well as the success in retaining the social and cultural aesthetic elements of the source language. The literal and calque techniques used in this subtitle allow the audience to understand the meaning of the dialogue without losing the Chinese cultural context. This is an example of the application of foreignization strategies in subtitling that is oriented towards cross-cultural education, not merely audience convenience.

**Table 2.** Data Collected

Tsu	你看，机器猫。 ( <i>nǐ kàn, jī qì māo</i> )
Tsa	See, the robotic cat.

From the analysis of connotative meaning, 机器猫 *jī qì māo* is a nickname for the famous Japanese character Doraemon in China. Although not a literal translation of “Doraemon”, the term is used because it describes the character's identity as a cat-shaped robot. In translation to Indonesian, the word “Doraemon” is used directly. Although not literal, this is a cultural substitution that is more recognizable to local Indonesian audiences.

In Chinese, “机器猫 *jī qì māo*” is a Chinese cultural description of the Japanese character Doraemon—not an official name, but a function-based nickname (cat + machine). It reflects the way local culture absorbs foreign elements through its own linguistic lens.

However, in the translation to Indonesian, the translator replaced it directly with “Doraemon” instead of “robot cat”. This strategy is a form of domestication of popular culture so that Indonesian audiences immediately grasp the context of the character without confusion. The translator does not translate literally, but adapts to the cultural perception of the target audience. The use of the name Doraemon is a form of cultural appropriation that is more receptively aesthetic as it avoids dissonance of meaning. If it

had been translated as “robot cat”, the Indonesian audience might not have immediately associated it with the character Doraemon - yet emotional effects and character identification are part of the aesthetics in audiovisual narratives.

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Table below is the next data analyzed.

**Table 3. Data Collected**

Tsu	你要是觉得我学习不好，不配当班长。 ( <i>nǐ yào shì jué de wǒ xué xí bù hǎo, bú pèi dāng bān zhǎng.</i> )
Tsa	If you think I'm not a good student, I don't deserve to be class president.

The sentence above conveys an introspective and defensive expression from a character in a strong social context, specifically related to the position or position of responsibility in the school environment, namely as class president (班长). Semantically, the sentence structure is conditional - signaled by the use of the phrase 你要是..., meaning “if you...”. This forms a conditional proposition, which indicates a supposition or possibility rather than a certainty. The protagonist in this sentence is questioning her eligibility to be class president from the perspective of others, especially in terms of learning achievement. This sentence reflects a reflective and humble attitude, which is an important value in Chinese culture, especially in social interactions between individuals in groups.

In terms of language aesthetics, this sentence combines logic and emotion. The choice of diction such as 不配 (“inappropriate”) has a strong emotional and moral content. It does not simply express incompetence, but rather shows an ethical awareness that leadership should be based on ability and real achievements. The sentence structure is concise, direct, yet still shows politeness by referring to the other party's opinion (“if you feel...”), rather than just one's own judgment. Culturally, this shows the importance of respect for social judgment (miànzi, 面子), as well as the value of hard work and meritocracy in the Chinese educational context. It can also be interpreted as a subtle form of protest or self-defense that is not frontal, but wrapped in a socially acceptable normative and emotional awareness.

Table below is the next data analyzed.

**Table 4.** Data Collected

Tsu	请问是杨夕同学家吗?。 ( <i>qǐng wèn shì Yáng Xī tóngxué jiā ma?</i> )
Tsa	Excuse me, is this the home of Yang Xi's classmate?

This short sentence displays a polite, refined style of language that strongly reflects the communication manners in Chinese culture. Semantically, the phrase 请问 (qǐng wèn) which means “excuse me, may I ask...” is used as an opening that shows high politeness. In Chinese society, this expression is not only a formality, but also a form of respect to the interlocutor, especially when interacting with strangers or in more official contexts. This shows that in Chinese culture, even the way of asking questions should emphasize manners (礼貌 lǐmào).

The phrase 是杨夕同学家吗? translates as “is this the house of the student named Yang Xi?”. The word 同学 (tóngxué) meaning “classmate” or “student” emphasizes the social relation between individuals, which in Chinese culture is often the basis of communication structure: 同学 tóngxué indicates not only the name, but also the role or social status in the group (in this case as a student). The mention of the full name 杨夕 (Yáng Xī) coupled with the greeting 同学 tóngxué, reinforces the formal yet personal feel.

In terms of aesthetics, this sentence is short, concise, yet full of politeness and hierarchical structure in social relations. The question sentence ends with the particle 吗 (ma), typical of Chinese question structures that show a soft, non-aggressive intonation. This makes the question feel not interrogating, but rather showing goodwill and respect.

This communication aesthetic is not only expressed in word choice, but also in sentence structure, reflecting Chinese cultural values such as respect for others, avoidance of conflict, and the importance of harmonious social relationships.

Table below is the next data analyzed.

**Table 5.** Data Collected

Tsu	你那个粉色捷安特。 ( <i>nǐ nà gè fēn sè jié ān tè</i> )
Tsa	Your pink Giant.

This sentence/phrase consists of several elements that complement each other: “你” (nǐ) means “you”, “那个” (nà gè) is a pointer meaning “that one” or “it”, “粉色” (fěnsè) means “pink”, and ‘捷安特’ (jié ān tè) is a brand-which in the Indonesian context is commonly known as “Giant” (a bicycle brand, for example). In denotative meaning, this phrase conveys a direct identification or designation of a specific object that is pink and labeled with the brand, as if to point or direct the listener/reader's attention to the item or subject in question.

In terms of cultural and aesthetic value, the use of the pointer “那个” (nà gè) gives a sense of specificity and a bit of informality that is prevalent in everyday conversation. In Chinese culture, this kind of phrase is often used to directly designate an object without the need for a formal introduction, resulting in an intimate and casual atmosphere. The color “粉色” (fěnsè) or pink, on the one hand, exudes a sense of cuteness or softness, but when applied to a branded product such as “捷安特” (jié ān tè) which is synonymous with bicycles-a product generally associated with sports activities or mobility-then there is an interesting aesthetic contrast between the soft feel and the modern/technical feel of the brand. This kind of contrast can invite curiosity and show a marketing or lifestyle effort that combines fun and innovative elements.

**Table 6.** Data Collected

Tsu	以后要真成了废物，点心。 ( <i>yǐ hòu yào zhēn chéng le fèi wù, diǎn xīn.</i> )
Tsa	You're going to be a loser, Dim Sum.

This sentence contains strong emotional and rhetorical meaning. The phrase以后要真成了废物 (*yǐ hòu yào zhēn chéng le fèi wù*) literally means “if you really become trash/useless person.” The word 废物 (*fèi wù*) in Chinese culture is a very sharp and derogatory term, often used to describe someone who fails to live up to expectations or is socially or personally useless. In this context, the word is used with dramatic and emotional effect, usually as a form of frustration, regret, or sarcasm towards someone (possibly oneself or an interlocutor) who is considered a potential failure if not careful.

Aesthetically, this sentence combines expressive style with elements of irony. Rhetoric is used to emphasize concern for one's future through extreme word choice (废物) to describe failure, and the unexpected ending (点心) adds color and emotional depth to the expression. In Chinese culture, this kind of expression often appears in the daily conversations of teenagers and is popular in drama



or fiction as a form of dialog that is sharp yet holds affective meaning.

In terms of cultural value, it reflects the high social pressure in China's culture of education and achievement. Failing is considered not only a personal shortcoming, but also a moral and social burden. As such, this sentence is a representation of the culture's anxiety towards failure, as well as a typical way of admonishing someone not to slacken their spirits.

Table bellow is the next data analyzed.

**Table 7.** Data Collected

Tsu	你不是吃枪药了你? ( <i>Nǐ bù shì chī qiāng yào le nǐ?</i> )
Tsa	Aren't you taking any gun medication?

However, this sentence is actually an idiomatic expression in Chinese, which is used to describe someone who becomes very angry or behaves aggressively, as if he or she has “taken a dangerous drug” (a drug used for weapons). Literally, it may not make sense, but idiomatically, it is an exaggerated way of asking if someone is “angry” or “overzealous”. The phrase “你不是吃枪药了你?” (*Nǐ bú shì chī qiāng yào le nǐ?*) is an idiomatic expression in Mandarin that literally means “Aren't you eating gunk?” However, in meaning, this expression does not refer to the actual act of eating drugs, but rather is a metaphor that implies someone is in a state of high emotion, anger, or violent and explosive behavior. It is often used in everyday conversation as a form of rhetorical criticism or satire against someone who is being unusual or overly aggressive.

Aesthetically, this idiom demonstrates the expressive richness of the Chinese language that uses strong and hyperbolic imagery to convey emotional meaning, making it not only a means of communication but also a form of verbal beauty. Culturally, this idiom reflects social values in Chinese society that emphasize self-control and harmony in social interactions; explosive emotional behavior is considered deviant and worth reprimanding in a rhetorical and subtle manner. In the context of translation into Indonesian, this expression demands a transcultural approach as its literal meaning is difficult to understand outside its original cultural context. Therefore, translators need to replace the expression with equivalent phrases in meaning and tone, such as “You're really angry, aren't you?” or “Why are you being so fierce?” to retain its expressive nuance and communicative function in a context that is more understandable to Indonesian audiences.

Table bellow is the next data analyzed.

**Table 8.** Data Collected

Tsu	回班回班回班丢死人了 ( <i>Huí bān huí bān huí bān diū sǐ rén le</i> )
Tsa	Back to class, back to class. It's embarrassing..

The phrase “回班回班回班丢死人了” is an emotional expression that arises in stressful situations, and linguistically reflects the repetition and emotional outburst patterns typical of teenage conversations in the drama *When We Were Young*. The phrase “回班” (*huí bān*), meaning “go back to class”, is repeated three times in a row. This repetition aesthetically reflects the speaker's urgent command or frustration towards the interlocutor, indicating that the person wants to end the chaos immediately or encourage others to return to their proper routines.

Followed by “丢死人了” (*diū sǐ rén le*), literally meaning “go die already”, this phrase sounds extreme and rude, but in the context of Chinese youth's daily conversation, phrases like this are often used to express high aggravation or describe a particularly chaotic situation, rather than actually telling someone to die. In terms of aesthetic value, this sentence contains high emotional intensity with a dramatic repetitive structure. It illustrates the expressive richness of spoken Chinese that is loaded with theatricality and hyperbolic style, very typical in the communication style of teenage characters in contemporary teen dramas. Culturally, these expressions show the social dynamics between teenagers, where assertiveness, group pressure and emotional outbursts are part of everyday interactions. In translation into Indonesian, the challenge arises in maintaining the nuances of emotion, without making the translation sound harsh or unethical. Therefore, more subtle and contextualized equivalents such as “Balik ke kelas sana! I'm crazy!” or “Let's go back to class, someone might die if this continues!” can be used to maintain the intensity of the emotion, while still being acceptable within the norms of the target language.

Table bellow is the next data analyzed.

**Table 9.** Data Collected

Tsu	育才中学人杰地灵 ( <i>Yùcái zhōngxué rén jié dì líng</i> )
Tsa	Yucai Middle School is a place of great talent

The phrase “育才中学人杰地灵” (*Yùcái zhōngxué rén jié dì líng*) is an expression of high symbolic and aesthetic significance in the Chinese cultural context. Denotatively, it can be translated as “Yucai High School, a place of excellent people and a land of talent.” The phrase mentions the name of the school -育才中学 (Yucai Zhongxue) - which literally means “Talent Development High School.” The

follow-up phrase “人杰地灵” (rén jié dì líng) is a classic idiom meaning “great people emerge from extraordinary places,” with 人杰 referring to “excellent figures” and 地灵 meaning “a land full of spirit or spiritual energy.” This idiom is often used to praise a place that is considered to have given birth to many talented or meritorious people.

Table below is the next data analyzed.

**Table 10.** Data Collected

Tsu	小流氓，敢碰我的学生一根汗毛，看我怎么收拾 ( <i>Xiǎo liúmáng, gǎn pèng wǒ de xuéshēng yì gēn hàn máo kàn wǒ zěnmē shōushi nǐ</i> )
Tsa	Little rascal, dare to touch a hair on my student's. let's see what I'll do to you.

This sentence can be denotatively translated as: “Little bastard, dare to touch even one hair of my student, see how I'll take care of you.” The phrase 小流氓 (xiǎo liúmáng) means “little thug” or “little bastard” and is used as a form of insult that denigrates the status of the interlocutor. The phrase 敢碰我的学生一根汗毛 (gǎn pèng wǒ de xuéshēng yì gēn hàn máo) meaning “dare to touch a single hair of my student”-contains the metaphor of extreme protection of students, showing that the speaker highly values loyalty, responsibility, and the courage to protect the weak. It emphasizes the limits of protection with hyperbolic yet soulful language. The final phrase 看我怎么收拾你 (kàn wǒ zěnmē shōushi nǐ), or “see how I'll take care of you,” is a powerful threat, showing assertiveness and anger.

Connotatively, this sentence reflects the value of courage, loyalty, and protection of others in Chinese social culture, especially in the context of intergenerational relations or within social groups such as classmates or extended family. The language used is emotionally charged and expresses strong solidarity—a common characteristic in Chinese youth drama narratives, which often address themes of kinship, loyalty, and honor.

In terms of aesthetics, the use of idioms such as “touching a strand of hair” presents highly visual and dramatic imagery, enriching the intensity of emotions in the conversation. In translation into Indonesian, it is important to maintain the emotional tone, honor and courage displayed in this sentence. A contextually and tonally equivalent equivalent would be: "Little thug! Dare to touch my student by a hair, see what I'll do to you!" This translation retains the elements of threat, protection, and emotion, while feeling more natural in the context of Indonesian teenage conversation.

## CONCLUSION

Through the analysis of some subtitle excerpts from the drama *When We Were Young*, it can be concluded that subtitle translation not only mediates linguistic messages, but also carries distinctive

aesthetic, emotional and cultural values from the source language (Chinese) to the target language (Indonesian). Sentences such as “你是不是吃枪药了你？” or “回班回班去死人了” contain idioms, hyperbole and rhetorical expressions typical of Chinese teenagers, who are full of energy, spontaneity and emotional communication style. The translation of subtitles into Indonesian requires a high degree of sensitivity to social context, cultural norms, and emotional nuances in order to keep the connotative meaning and aesthetic value of the dialog intact and easily understood by Indonesian audiences. Classical idioms such as “人杰地灵” and protective metaphors in “敢碰我的学生一根汗毛” reflect the blending of Chinese literary heritage and contemporary social realities in the play's narrative, while enriching the cultural dynamics transferred through the audiovisual medium.

Based on the findings of the analysis, future research can be directed at studying the translation strategies of idiomatic and rhetorical expressions in Chinese teen drama subtitles into Indonesian, especially in the context of digital platforms such as WeTV.

This research can explore the extent to which the cultural and aesthetic values of the original language can be preserved or adapted in translation, as well as how it affects the understanding and acceptance of Indonesian audiences. It also has the potential to develop an adaptive translation model based on ecotranslation theory for cross-cultural audiovisual subtitles.

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