

An Exploration of Translation Strategies for the International Promotion of Intangible Cultural Heritage in China: A Case Study of Daoqing Shadow Play

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Abstract: This paper explores the translation strategies for the international promotion of intangible cultural heritage (ICH) in Central China, using Huanxian Daoqing Shadow Play as a case study. In the context of globalization, effectively conveying the cultural values of ICH is crucial. The research identifies several challenges facing current translation practices, including the lack of standardized guidelines, vague audience targeting, and a shortage of qualified translators. To address the uniqueness of Daoqing Shadow Play, this paper proposes a diversified translation strategy that combines domestication and foreignization, aiming to enhance its international accessibility while maintaining cultural authenticity. Additionally, the importance of establishing a bilingual or multilingual corpus is emphasized, along with a call for relevant departments support in cultivating professional translation talents. The findings indicate that through effective translation strategies and relevant departments backing, the international promotion of Daoqing Shadow Play can significantly enhance the global visibility of Chinese culture and strengthen its cultural soft power, providing a comprehensive framework for the sustainable transmission and appreciation of ICH in a rapidly changing global environment.

Keywords: Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH); External Promotion; Daoqing Shadow Play; Translation Strategies; Cultural Exchange

1. Introduction

In July 2023, the leader emphasized in his congratulatory letter to the Third Dialogue on Civilizational Exchanges and Mutual Learning and the First World Sinology Conference: "Equal exchanges and mutual learning among

different civilizations will provide strong spiritual guidance for humanity to tackle contemporary challenges and achieve common development." Chinese intangible cultural heritage (ICH), with its unique creativity, value concepts, and distinct characteristics, vividly showcases the essence of Chinese culture and serves as a driving force for the sustainable development of exchanges and mutual learning between Chinese and foreign civilizations. As an important component of traditional Chinese culture, ICH has increasingly become a vital resource for China's external promotion and cultural exchange.

However, as a country with a large population and rapid technological advancements, China faces significant challenges from the influx of foreign cultures in the process of globalization[1]. The overlapping dissemination of different national cultures continuously impacts existing cultural practices, particularly ICH. Simultaneously, the artistic transmission activities of ethnic cultural inheritors are threatened by the rules of the global market.

Huanxian Daoqing Shadow Play was listed as one of the first batch of national intangible cultural heritage items in 2006 and became part of UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in 2011. Despite the national efforts to promote the international dissemination of ICH, there remains considerable research potential in the external translation efforts of Huanxian Daoqing Shadow Play, which urgently requires further exploration.

2. Overview of External Translation for Intangible Cultural Heritage

Intangible cultural heritage (ICH) refers to the traditional cultural expressions passed down through generations by various ethnic groups, along with the associated tangible artifacts and sites[2]. China boasts over 100,000

representative ICH items at various levels, with 43 included in UNESCO's ICH list, the highest number in the world. These items not only represent the treasures of Chinese culture but also constitute an important part of global cultural diversity.

Broadly speaking, external promotion translation involves translating China's political, economic, cultural, and other information into foreign languages. This type of translation is closely linked to the establishment of the national image, the construction of a harmonious international development environment, and the "going global" strategy of cultural outreach. Unlike other forms of translation, external promotion translation must consider the dual tasks of translation and publicity, with dissemination as the ultimate goal.

The external translation of ICH is a significant aspect of external promotion translation, focusing on conveying the content, characteristics, and values of ICH to the international community through translation, thereby enhancing understanding and recognition of Chinese culture abroad. As the government increasingly emphasizes the importance of ICH, academic research on external translation for ICH has garnered growing attention.

The protection, reform, and transmission of Huanxian Daoqing Shadow Play have been ongoing since the 1950s. As one of the pilot projects for the national intangible cultural heritage protection initiative, the government has provided extensive support to enhance its domestic influence. However, significant gaps remain in external promotion efforts, making it challenging to find relevant information abroad. Even within China, English promotional materials are relatively scarce. Therefore, researchers need to accurately grasp the cultural connotations of Daoqing Shadow Play and undertake specialized external promotion translation to facilitate the domestic and international dissemination of excellent traditional Chinese culture.

3. Cultural Connotations of Daoqing Shadow Play

Shadow play is an ancient traditional folk art in China, also known as "shadow theater" or "lamp shadow play," and belongs to the category of puppet theater. This art form utilizes oil lamps, candles, or other light sources to project the

silhouettes of characters made from animal hides or cardboard, thereby performing narratives. During performances, artists either stand or sit behind a white screen, manipulating the shadow puppets while accompanied by local melodies and percussion or string instruments, creating a rich local atmosphere. Daoqing Shadow Play is rooted in Taoist art, featuring a long history and distinct Han cultural characteristics. Huanxian Daoqing Shadow Play is a synthesis of "Daoqing" and "shadow play," integrating oral literature, folk music, folk art, and various cultural activities into a comprehensive theatrical art form[3].

Folk activities serve as the soil for the existence of shadow play; events such as deity worship, village temple fairs, and celebrations for marriage and funerals often include shadow performances. The key elements of Daoqing Shadow Play encompass Daoqing (musical characteristics), shadow puppets (material components), and the performance itself (including acting style and narrative content). These three aspects reflect its connection to folk beliefs and daily life[4]. The shadow play performance, utilizing the materiality of "shadow" and the formality of "theater," serves as a visual expression of various aspects of folk life and symbolizes a means to address challenges within that life. It represents the concrete practice of folk beliefs while simultaneously providing a unique manifestation of the divine.

Shadow play serves dual social functions: "entertaining the gods" (through rituals and offerings) and "entertaining people" (as a form of leisure). "Entertaining the gods" refers to actions taken by people to please deities through offerings, dance, and music, seeking blessings. As a medium for local beliefs and folk activities, Huanxian Daoqing Shadow Play vividly expresses the public's strong desire for divine protection, relief from hardship, and a harmonious life characterized by good weather, food security, and overall well-being.

During local temple fairs in Huan County, shadow play provides a platform for communal rituals aimed at honoring and pleasing the deities, acting as a bridge between the divine and human realms while carrying the hopes and beliefs of the community. Through these performances, audiences collectively experience the blessings and joy brought by the deities. Thus, "entertaining the gods" becomes a significant

objective of shadow play performances, reflecting practical and utilitarian aspects. On the other hand, shadow play is a comprehensive performing art that integrates elements of painting, sculpture, music, drama, and literature, with entertainment as one of its primary functions. In traditional agricultural societies, where leisure activities were limited, shadow play not only enriched the mundane lives of people but also served as a medium for emotional expression.

4. The Value of Foreign Promotion Translation for Intangible Cultural Heritage in Central China

4.1 Promoting the Charm of Intangible Cultural Heritage and Enhancing National Cultural Soft Power

With the deepening of globalization, national cultural soft power has become a significant indicator of a country's influence. Intangible cultural heritage serves as a vital source of China's cultural soft power, and foreign promotion translation plays a crucial role in introducing these unique cultural resources to the world. This process enhances China's cultural influence and recognition on the international stage, thereby elevating its overall cultural soft power. For instance, "Kunqu," an ancient Chinese theatrical art form, has not only shone on the international stage through precise foreign promotion translation but has also been successfully included in UNESCO's "Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity" list. This inclusion significantly boosts the international recognition and reputation of Chinese culture. The overseas tours of Kunqu performances vividly demonstrate China's cultural soft power, allowing the world to appreciate the profound heritage and unique charm of Chinese culture.

4.2 Building Bridges to Promote Civilizational Mutual Learning and Connectivity

Intangible cultural heritage embodies the rich and unique cultures of nations and ethnicities, serving as a testament to history and a distinctive link connecting different civilizations. This cross-cultural exchange extends beyond the dissemination of cultural forms and performing arts; it encompasses the convergence and collision of cultural concepts, values, and aesthetic preferences. Through foreign promotion translation, the cultural arts of various

countries and regions can inspire and engage with one another, creating a more vibrant cultural ecosystem. For example, "Chinese paper-cutting" has become a popular topic in international cultural exchanges thanks to effective foreign promotion translation. This traditional craft not only showcases the exquisite techniques of Chinese folk art but also fosters mutual understanding and respect between Chinese and foreign peoples. During international exhibitions and cultural exchange events, paper-cutting works often become subjects of shared admiration and learning, deepening mutual understanding among different civilizations and realizing the beautiful vision of interconnected hearts and minds.

4.3 Activating the Economic Potential of Intangible Cultural Heritage to Support Local Prosperity

The foreign promotion translation of intangible cultural heritage serves not only as a vehicle for cultural dissemination but also as a new engine for economic development. Taking the Huanxian Daoqing Shadow Play as an example, this niche regional art form faces the challenge of rapidly diminishing audiences amidst the pressures of multicultural influences. Through foreign promotion translation, this unique cultural resource has the opportunity to reach a global audience, enhancing its international recognition and influence. This cultural appeal can stimulate the development of related tourism industries and ignite foreign tourists' demand for cultural consumption, subsequently fostering the rise of complementary tourism services, such as professional guided tours and handicraft sales. Moreover, the international promotion of cultural industries can attract more foreign investment collaborations, injecting strong momentum into local economies, enhancing employment levels, and optimizing economic structures. For instance, "Jingdezhen ceramics," renowned for its unique craftsmanship and aesthetic value, has captured global attention through effective foreign promotion translation. This not only facilitated the international development of the Jingdezhen ceramics industry but also contributed to the prosperity of local tourism. Tourists are drawn to experience ceramic production and purchase distinctive products, providing a significant boost to the local economy. Concurrently, the expansion into international markets has opened up more

collaborative opportunities and financial support for the Jingdezhen ceramics industry, promoting sustained and healthy economic development in the region.

5. Challenges in the Foreign Promotion Translation of Intangible Cultural Heritage

5.1 Relative Lack of International Outreach

Currently, many intangible cultural heritage (ICH) projects primarily focus on domestic markets, neglecting the importance and understanding of international markets. The managers and promoters of these projects often believe that the preservation and transmission of ICH primarily rely on domestic support, overlooking its unique value and position within global cultural diversity. This lack of awareness restricts the international visibility and influence of ICH.

Moreover, the channels for the international dissemination of ICH are relatively limited, with a scarcity of diverse platforms and means of communication. While some ICH projects attempt to reach audiences through international exhibitions and cultural exchange activities, they often face constraints related to funding and human resources, which hinder the formation of sustained and effective promotional efforts. Additionally, the utilization of modern communication methods, such as international media cooperation and overseas social media promotion, remains insufficient, further limiting the reach and impact of ICH.

Finally, the content of ICH's international promotion is often relatively uniform, lacking specificity and innovation. Many projects tend to provide only basic information, such as historical background and production techniques, without delving deeply into cultural connotations and artistic values. This singular approach fails to capture the interest and attention of international audiences and does not fully showcase the unique charm and significance of ICH.

5.2 Lack of Unified Translation Standards and Varied Quality

The translation of intangible cultural heritage (ICH) for international promotion faces challenges related to the lack of unified standards and the variability in quality. Given that ICH encompasses various fields such as folklore, handicrafts, and performing arts, the

complexity of specialized terminology and cultural connotations places high demands on the professional competence and cultural understanding of translators. However, there is currently no standardized set of translation criteria in the market, resulting in significant discrepancies in outcomes when different translation teams or individuals handle the same project.

Moreover, some translators may have insufficient knowledge of ICH or limited language skills, which hinders their ability to accurately convey the cultural essence, sometimes leading to mistranslations or omissions. For example, in the case of "Chinese Paper Cutting," the inconsistency in translation standards often results in varying names for this ICH project in international contexts; some may translate it as "Chinese Paper Cutting," while others may refer to it as "Chinese Scissor Art." Such differences not only confuse international audiences but also weaken the coherence of brand recognition. Furthermore, specific patterns and meanings in paper-cutting works, if inaccurately or overly literally translated, often lose their original cultural significance and artistic value. For instance, translating "xi que deng mei" merely as "Magpie on Plum Blossom" fails to convey its deeper connotations of auspiciousness and celebration in Chinese culture.

5.3 Shortage of Multidisciplinary Translators

The shortage of multidisciplinary translation talents poses another significant challenge for the international promotion of ICH. Translating ICH requires not only solid language skills but also a deep understanding of its historical background, cultural connotations, and artistic characteristics. However, such versatile translators are currently scarce in the market, making it difficult to meet the demand. Additionally, inheritors of ICH projects often possess exceptional skills but have limited language proficiency, while professional translators may lack an in-depth understanding of ICH. This information asymmetry exacerbates the issue of the absence of qualified translation personnel.

For example, in the international promotion of "Sichuan Opera Face-Changing," the shortage of multidisciplinary translators is particularly evident. This art form, known for its unique performance techniques and rich cultural

significance, attracts considerable attention from international audiences. Accurately conveying this complex art form to foreign audiences requires translators who are not only proficient in both Chinese and English but also possess a comprehensive understanding of Sichuan Opera's history, performance techniques, and cultural meanings. However, the scarcity of such multidisciplinary translators has led to many introductions and commentaries on Sichuan Opera Face-Changing appearing awkward and superficial in translation, failing to fully showcase its artistic charm.

5.4 Lack of Focus on Target Audiences

In the context of translating intangible cultural heritage (ICH) for international promotion, issues related to unclear audience targeting and a lack of understanding of the preferences of target language readers cannot be overlooked. The international dissemination of ICH should accurately consider the cultural backgrounds, aesthetic habits, and levels of acceptance of different countries and regions to ensure that the content resonates with and engages the target audience[5]. However, many ICH projects currently lack clear audience classification and positioning in their external communications, resulting in content that is not sufficiently targeted and struggles to effectively attract and retain international audiences.

Moreover, insufficient research on the reading habits and information reception styles of target language readers further undermines the effectiveness of communication efforts. For instance, when promoting Peking Opera in European and American markets, failing to account for the cultural backgrounds and aesthetic preferences of the target audience can lead to low acceptance rates. Audiences in Europe and America often favor direct and concise expressions, and the complex plots, character relationships, and performance techniques inherent in Peking Opera may pose challenges to their understanding and appreciation. Therefore, it is essential to adopt communication strategies that are more aligned with the cultural contexts and aesthetic preferences of these audiences during the translation and promotion process.

6. Solutions for Translating Intangible Cultural Heritage for International Promotion

6.1 Precise Targeting of Generation Z: Innovating Content and Form

In light of the insufficient influence of intangible cultural heritage (ICH) among younger international audiences, this paper advocates focusing on the cultural preferences of Generation Z (The cohort born between 1995 and 2009, currently ranging in age from 15 to 29, represents the generation that emerged at the dawn of the 21st century)[6]. By utilizing cutting-edge new media technologies such as creative short videos, social media interactions, and virtual/augmented reality (VR/AR), we can reshape the presentation of ICH to align more closely with the aesthetic sensibilities and interests of young people. Content-wise, it is essential to delve into the narratives and emotional aspects behind ICH, constructing engaging storytelling frameworks that resonate with younger audiences and ignite their emotional connection and enthusiasm for participation. This approach effectively addresses the issue of audience disconnection.

6.2 Digital Empowerment: Building a Global Communication Network and Integrating Cultural Industries

To fill the relative gap in the international dissemination of ICH, this paper suggests leveraging digital technologies such as big data and cloud computing to establish a digital resource repository and online communication platform for ICH[7]. This initiative aims to broaden communication channels and facilitate instant, multilingual dissemination on a global scale. Additionally, developing digital experience projects related to ICH, such as online courses and virtual exhibitions, can transcend geographical limitations, allowing international audiences to engage directly with the allure of ICH.

Furthermore, it is crucial to promote the deep integration of ICH with modern cultural industries, creating culturally impactful brands and intellectual properties (IPs) with international influence. This can be achieved through the development of cultural and creative products, hosting international cultural festivals, and enhancing the commercial value and market competitiveness of ICH. Strengthening partnerships with renowned international cultural institutions will further facilitate the global dissemination of intangible cultural

heritage.

6.3 Establishing a Bilingual Corpus to Standardize Translation Practices in Response to Cultural Differences

To address the issues of inconsistent standards and varying quality in the translation of intangible cultural heritage (ICH) for international promotion, this paper proposes the establishment of a bilingual or multilingual corpus dedicated to ICH. This corpus would integrate translation resources encompassing professional terminology, cultural connotations, and artistic features. By conducting expert reviews and engaging in multi-party consultations, unified translation standards and guidelines can be developed, providing translators with accessible tools that enhance both efficiency and quality. In terms of translation strategies, a combination of domestication and foreignization is advocated. The domestication approach emphasizes aligning with the cultural background and reception habits of the target audience, making the translated content more relatable to their expectations. Conversely, the foreignization strategy retains the distinctive features and heterogeneity of the source culture, showcasing the unique charm of ICH. In practice, these strategies should be flexibly chosen or combined based on the specific context of the ICH projects and their dissemination goals to achieve optimal communication effectiveness.

6.4 Strengthening Government Support to Provide a Solid Backing for ICH International Promotion

Finally, this paper underscores the crucial role of government in the international dissemination of ICH, calling for the formulation of relevant policies and financial support measures to ensure the smooth entry of ICH projects into international markets. Specifically, the government should establish dedicated funds, implement tax incentives, and create international exchange platforms to stimulate the promotion of ICH. These measures will not only provide necessary financial backing for ICH projects but also enhance their visibility and competitiveness on the international stage. Furthermore, a specialized training fund should be established to cultivate professionals skilled in translating ICH for international promotion, ensuring a pool of high-quality talent with

cultural understanding and linguistic competence capable of accurately conveying the essence of ICH[8]. Additionally, strengthening collaboration with international organizations will help secure more global resources and support, further advancing the global dissemination and protection of ICH. Ultimately, these efforts will foster the co-development of ICH and the economy, achieving sustainable cultural heritage transmission and innovation.

7. Conclusion

This paper focuses on the international promotion of intangible cultural heritage (ICH) in the Central Plains region, using Huanxian Daoqing Shadow Play as a specific case study to explore the strategies and practices of ICH external promotion and translation. In an increasingly globalized world, ICH serves not only as a treasure of national spirit but also as a vital embodiment of cultural diversity. Its international dissemination is crucial for enhancing cultural soft power and serves as an important means for facilitating civilizational exchange and mutual understanding. Through a detailed analysis of the cultural connotations, artistic characteristics, and current dissemination status of Huanxian Daoqing Shadow Play, this paper reveals several challenges faced by ICH external promotion and translation, including insufficient awareness of dissemination, lack of unified translation standards, a shortage of qualified translation professionals, and unclear audience targeting. These issues not only limit the international visibility and influence of ICH but also hinder its sustainable transmission and development within a globalized context.

In response to these challenges, this paper proposes a diversified set of solutions. To address these challenges, it emphasizes the importance of precisely targeting audiences while innovating content and format. It advocates for the effective use of digital technologies to establish a global dissemination network integrated with cultural industries. Additionally, the establishment of a bilingual corpus is recommended to unify translation standards and address cultural differences, along with enhanced governmental support to provide a solid backing for ICH external promotion.

In summary, ICH external promotion and translation is a complex and challenging task that requires collaborative efforts from government, academia, cultural institutions, and

heritage bearers. By implementing diverse translation strategies and dissemination methods, it is possible to elevate the international recognition and influence of ICH, promote exchange and mutual understanding between different civilizations, and contribute Chinese wisdom and strength to the construction of a community with a shared future for mankind. As globalization continues to deepen and technology advances, the international dissemination of ICH will encounter more opportunities and challenges. The author looks forward to more scholars and practitioners engaging in both research and practical applications in this field, collectively promoting the transmission and innovation of ICH, allowing Chinese culture to shine even brighter on the world stage.

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