

# On the English Translation and Its Communication Effect of Cultural Intangible Heritage in Zhejiang Province from the Perspective of Communication Theory

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## ABSTRACT

High-quality English translation of intangible cultural heritage(ICH) in Zhejiang Province will facilitate the external communication of Zhejiang culture. From the perspective of communication theory, this paper takes English translated texts of several national ICH texts as examples and analyzes the communication effect of translated ICH texts with appropriate translation methods adopted according to different types of ICH lists. The author has found that literal translation, transliteration plus annotation, free translation and omission are often adopted by the translators so that the translated ICH texts can avoid the noise and achieve best communication effect. To improve the translation quality of ICH in Zhejiang Province, the translator should always take the communication subject, the content of communication, the communication medium, the audience of communication, and the communication effect of translation into account by adapting to the linguistic habit and cultural background of target readers.

**Keywords:** English translation of cultural intangible heritage, Zhejiang Province, communication theory, communication effect; 5W model

## 1. INTRODUCTION

China's intangible cultural heritage (ICH) has become an important medium for transmitting Chinese culture, including folk literature, music, dance, drama, folk art, fine arts, acrobatics and competitions, handicrafts, traditional medicine and folklore. If China's ICH should be effectively introduced to the outside world, it would greatly improve soft power of China. The external communication of (ICH) requires translation. As an indispensable "intermediary" of cross-cultural communication, translation has an immeasurable effect on the soft power of a nation.

With the theoretical guidance of communication theory, this paper analyzes the English translation materials of the national intangible cultural heritage in Zhejiang Province, mainly including Ninghai Shili Red Makeup Wedding Custom, Longquan Celadon Firing Technique, Dongyang Wood Carving, Yueqing Gold Lacquer Log, Yue Kiln Celadon and Yue Opera. Then the author studies its communication effect, and

summarizes translation methods so as to improve the quality of ICH translation and promote the oversea spread of ICH.

## 2. COMMUNICATION THEORY AND ENGLISH TRANSLATION OF INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE

Communication is a science that takes the phenomenon of human communication as the research object. In the first half of the 20th century, the United States first proposed the concept of "communication studies" in the process of interdisciplinary research. Convenient way to describe an act of communication is to answer: Who? Says what? In which channel? To whom? With what effect? The American communication scholar Lasswell, one of the founders of modern communication theory, put forward a single communication mode—"5W model" in his article, that is, communication subject, communication content, communication medium, communication object and

communication effect[1]. According to the basic mode of communication, this process can be explained as: in a



complete information communication process, the communicator needs to encode the information, and then transmit it to the recipient through the medium (receiver), the receiver needs to decode the information after receiving the information, and after decoding, it needs to be encoded again to transmit the feedback of the information interpretation back to the communicator.

In 1997, as a pioneer researcher of translation and communication theory in China, Lv Jun first put forward the view that “translation studies are a special field of communication studies”. He pointed out that there are seven elements in communication studies in translation field, namely, the communication subject of translation, the content of communication in translation, the communication medium of translation, the audience of communication in translation, the communication effect of translation, the purpose of communication in translation and the communication environment in translation, which constitute the communication environment of translation[2]. The process of translation is like the coding in the communication mode. Likewise, the translators translate the received Chinese text of ICH into English, delivering its connotation. However, translation is not only a change of language but also a change of culture. Therefore, these factors lead to the inability of the translated information to be conveyed to readers equally, which is called “noise” in communication studies. Factors that hinder efficient communication are due to vocabulary, word order, logical confusion, social factors and psychological factors.

The translators of ICH texts, the main body of communication, have the dual identities of the recipient and the communicator, and should take the target readers as the center and actively play the role of the translator as a “filter”. The translators have to reconstruct the information of Chinese ICH texts in the way that target readers are accustomed and expected, and convert the expressions in the ICH translation that don’t conform to the language habits of English readers [3]. The recipients are the readers of the translated text of ICH. Differences in their language and culture, personal experience and reading expectations are factors that translators need to consider. In terms of the content of the communication, there is currently a wide variety of ICH in Zhejiang Province, but not all the lists have English materials. The main channels of communication of ICH are exhibition halls, the Internet, and brochures. Most of the corpus used in this article comes from museums, cultural centers, ICH museums, and ICH

research institutes in Zhejiang Province; some corpora are from the Internet, such as Confucius Institutes and cities’ external publicity websites. The communication effect is the focus of this study. Whether the English introduction materials of ICH can be understood by the disseminated objects determines the quality of the communication effect.

There are three major difficulties in the translation of China’s ICH, namely, the translation of ICH names with distinctive national characteristics, the translation of cultural specific items, and the conversion from Chinese to English metaphors [4]. Cultural factors are the biggest “noise”. In the process of cultural communication, it is worth studying how the translators select the communication content, eliminate or reduce the impact of “noise”, and take into account the receptive ability of the target readers and the best communication effect.

### 3. COMMUNICATION EFFECT ON ENGLISH TRANSLATION OF INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE IN ZHEJIANG PROVINCE

In order to effectively disseminate ICH in Zhejiang Province, translators need to adopt appropriate translation methods and techniques to reduce linguistic and cultural “noise”. Based on the collected Chinese-English publicity materials, the author takes three types of intangible cultural heritage in Chinese and English as examples: folklore, traditional handicrafts and opera, to analyze whether translations conform to the principles of ICH translation and discuss their communication effects.

#### 3.1. English Translation of ICH in Terms of Folk Customs

Publicity texts of folk customs mainly include the development history, specific forms and social values of the folklore. There are often more culturally specific items involved in the text, so the translators fail to find equivalents in Western culture. Therefore, the translator should use more annotations to restore the original information of ICH in terms of folk customs to the greatest extent for the sake of external communication, so that target readers can receive and understand foreign cultures and satisfy their reading expectations and curiosity. If there are culturally specific items in the text that are difficult for readers to understand, the translator needs to perform free translation, compilation, etc. Specific examples are analyzed as follows:

The national ICH “Ninghai Shili Red Makeup Wedding Custom” is a typical case of the historical inheritance of traditional marriage customs in the south of the Yangtze River. It involves a wealth of Chinese wedding customs and cultural terms, but it is vacant in

Western marriage customs culture. Therefore, translators need to adopt effective strategies to effectively spread and promote this folk culture. An translated introduction from the website Insight Ningbo goes: “The wedding preparations consisted of six parts: the match-making; discerning the bride’s birth date in accordance with the Bazi (8-character) horoscope; getting a fortune teller to predict the outcome at the bridegroom’s ancestral temple; giving gifts and cash to the bride; selecting an auspicious wedding date; and welcoming the bride.” Chinese people are quite familiar to “Liu Li”, but it is vacant in the marriage culture of the target readers. Therefore, the translator gives a further explanation of the specific meaning of “six rituals” and reduces in the interference factor in cultural communication---“noise”, helping the target readers understand Chinese marriage customs and meet the reading expectations.

### ***3.2. English Translation of ICH in Terms of Traditional Handicrafts***

Zhejiang is rich in ICH of traditional crafts items, such as traditional silk weaving techniques, traditional firing techniques of Longquan celadon, Dongyang woodcarving, Yueqing boxwood woodcarving, Qingtian stone carving, etc. The publicity texts include the introduction to the production process, finished products and their implicit cultural background. In the production process, literal translation is often used. When the equivalent language is vacant in the foreign language country, transliteration and annotation are used. Chinese introductory texts are gorgeous and lengthy, so it is necessary to omit some redundant information to adapt to the linguistic and thinking habits of the audience and achieve the ideal communication effect. Specific examples are analyzed as follows:

The introduction texts of traditional arts and crafts of ICH mainly focus on the production process and the description of the finished product. The descriptive vocabulary of the production process is equivalent to English, so literal translation is adopted mostly. For example, “Longquan celadon manufacturing process flow consists of 8 steps: material preparation, forming, trimming, decoration, glazing, biscuiting, boxing, loading into kiln and firing, among which glazing and firing stand themselves out for their characteristics.”

ICH texts often use multiple four-character idioms to describe handicrafts to highlight their superb skills. However, English language emphasizes brevity, and people tend convey the meaning of the original text to the reader without excessive modification. According to the characteristics of Chinese and English, the translator removes the “noise” in the process of communication. Yueqing golden lacquer log is one of Wenzhou’s famous intangible cultural heritages. The translated text goes: “Gold paint is the main paint color, with some

parts painted with gold foil, bright, magnificent and uneasy to fade.”

Yue kiln is the most famous celadon kiln in ancient China. During the Eastern Han Dynasty, the earliest porcelain in China was successfully fired in the Long Kiln of Yue Kiln. “Yue Kiln Celadon” is called “Mother Porcelain” because of its early production and long-lasting age. If “mother porcelain” is literally translated, it will undoubtedly make “noise” and cannot convey its true meaning to readers. The translator considers its history and paraphrases it as “The earliest mature porcelain”.

### ***3.3. English Translation of ICH in Term of Opera***

The English translation of Chinese opera involves the translation of the history, performance form, terminology and musical instruments of opera. Chinese opera is a form of performance art that narrates stories by rap and singing. Different from Western opera and drama, it is vacant in Western opera culture. Therefore, only transliteration cannot achieve effective communication effects. It needs to be further annotated with its connotations in the history and culture.

For example, an introduction to the development of Yue Opera goes: “The women artists replaced the Mu Biao system (Each drama used to have only an outline, rather than a script; actors performed as they wished, but within the outline.) with scripts.” If this term “Mu Biao system” is transliterated, the communication effect fails because the “noise” stops readers from getting to know the system. Therefore, annotation with what Mu Biao system really is needs to be provided.

However, there are also translation problems. The translation of “Wenzhou guci” in various websites adopts the transliteration “Wenzhou guci”. Wenzhou Drum Ci is a variety of folk art popular in Wenzhou, Zhejiang and its adjacent areas, commonly known as “singing lyrics”. The translation by *Learning Chinese as a Foreign Language* is “Wenzhou guci is a folk vocal art form popular in Wenzhou of Zhejiang Province and surrounding areas, commonly known as ‘Changci’ (singing lyrics)”. Therefore, it is recommended to change to Wenzhou Guci (Singing Lyrics).

## **4. CONCLUSION**

The “5W model” in communication studies provides a better theoretical perspective for the translation of intangible cultural heritage. This article interprets and analyzes the process of ICH translation from the five links of communication subject, communication content, communication medium, communication object and communication effect. Through the analysis, the author has found that most of translated texts are good

in quality, but some of them lack of systematic standard which hinders the communication effect. Therefore, the principles of English translation of ICH are the effect-first principle and target audience-centered principle which aim to make the translation conform to the thinking habits and reading expectations of the target audience, so as to achieve a good communication effect [5]. From the perspective of micro-translation strategy, the translators should follow the previous suggestions on the translation of existing Chinese ICH, take into account the characteristics of ICH in Zhejiang Province, avoid cultural misunderstandings, seek common ground while reserving differences, and deliver the excellent traditional culture with Zhejiang characteristics.

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