

The Core Framework and Reconstructing Strategies for the English-Mediated Communication of Jiang'an Bamboo Carving from a Cultural Translation Perspective

Xiulin Yu*

Sichuan University of Science and Engineering, Yibin, China

*Corresponding Author

ABSTRACT

As a national-level intangible cultural heritage (ICH) carrying Chinese literati aesthetics and philosophical thoughts, Jiang'an Bamboo Carving faces a core dilemma in its international communication: an imbalance between the deep-seated cultural "incommensurability" and the "superficiality" of its foreign language communication. Existing English texts mostly focus on process descriptions and factual accounts of craftsmanship, while neglecting the translational transformation of deep cultural connotations such as the "symbol of a man of virtue" and the "harmony between humanity and nature." This leads foreign audiences to encounter cognitive issues including symbolic misunderstanding, philosophical alienation, and emotional estrangement. From the perspective of English translation professionals, this paper, supported by Cultural Translation Theory, Thick Translation Theory, and Narrative Translation Theory, systematically elaborates on the role of translation as an "intermediary empowerment" tool in cross-cultural communication of ICH: eliminating cognitive barriers through Thick Translation of cultural symbols, building emotional connections via Narrative Translation of craftsmanship and philosophy, and enhancing communication effectiveness through context-adaptive translation tailored to multimodal scenarios. Ultimately, it realizes the upgrade from "language conversion" to "cultural meaning reconstruction," providing a theoretical framework for cross-cultural communication of ICH.

KEYWORDS

Jiang'an Bamboo Carving; Cultural Translation; Thick Translation; Narrative Translation; Context-Adaptive Translation; Cross-Cultural Communication.

1. INTRODUCTION

Cross-cultural communication of intangible cultural heritage is essentially the "cross-linguistic flow of cultural meanings." As the core intermediary connecting the source culture and the target culture, translation strategy directly determines the depth and breadth of communication effectiveness. Jiang'an Bamboo Carving uses the inner yellow layer of Moso bamboo as its unique raw material, integrating traditional Chinese symbols, landscape imagery, and the philosophy of "harmony between humanity and nature" through complex techniques such as "bamboo yellow turning" and "inlaying." Its cultural value lies not only in the exquisite craftsmanship but also in the literati aesthetics and ecological wisdom embodied in the material carrier. However, the current English communication of Jiang'an Bamboo Carving is still confined to the "fact-listing" translation paradigm: texts are mostly presented in the form of "terminology + data" (e.g., "national-level ICH," "300-year history," "Moso bamboo material"), while failing to provide cultural context or convey philosophical meanings. As a

result, foreign audiences' cognition remains at the superficial level of "bamboo carvings," unable to grasp its cultural value as an "epitome of traditional Chinese craft aesthetics."

From the perspective of English translation professionals, the root cause of this communication dilemma is not a linguistic expression barrier, but the "narrowing" of the concept of translation-viewing it merely as the correspondence of linguistic symbols while ignoring its essential function of "cultural interpretation." Therefore, there is an urgent need to reconstruct the English translation strategy for Jiang'an Bamboo Carving: guided by Cultural Translation Theory to balance "cultural authenticity" and "audience adaptability"; using Thick Translation to supplement context and eliminate cognitive barriers; and transforming abstract connotations into perceptible stories through Narrative Translation, promoting the cognitive upgrading of Jiang'an Bamboo Carving from a "craft" to an "aesthetic symbol."

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

At its core, cross-cultural communication of Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) involves the cross-linguistic flow of cultural meanings. As a key intermediary, translation strategies directly determine the depth and effectiveness of this communication. While current academic research on ICH translation has laid a theoretical and practical foundation for constructing English communication strategies for Jiang'an Bamboo Carving, significant gaps persist, particularly in targeted studies.

Theoretically, three frameworks are central to ICH translation. Venuti's (1995) Cultural Translation Theory introduces a dynamic balance between "domestication and foreignization," guiding the transmission of cultural symbols to avoid excessive adaptation or alienation. Appiah's (1993) Thick Translation theory advocates for the use of annotations and contextual supplementation to mitigate the "cultural discount" and facilitate the comprehension of culture-laden content. Echoing this, Cronin (2003) emphasizes translation's role as "cultural interpretation," which transcends mere language conversion.

In practice, studies have predominantly focused on well-known ICH items like Suzhou embroidery and ceramics, often favoring a "technicalized" approach to translation. Song Junhua (2017) notes that English texts for ICH often prioritize "fact-listing" over the transformation of cultural connotations. Fang Lili (2019) explores university-traditional craft collaboration models but does not address the impact of translation on communication efficacy. Regarding bamboo-based ICH, Du Guili (2015) and Lü Jing (2021) have analyzed the inheritance and international communication challenges of Southern Sichuan bamboo carving and Jiang'an Bamboo Carving, respectively. Wang Mengru (2024) examined its communication strategy in Japan; however, none have proposed a systematic English-language translation framework.

In the field of cross-cultural symbol transmission, scholars like Al-Jenaibi (2022) and Hu (2013) have verified the importance of contextual explanation and emotional connection, respectively. However, existing research pays insufficient attention to transmitting the unique craftsmanship and philosophical connotations of "niche ICH" items such as Jiang'an Bamboo Carving and lacks exploration of translational adaptation across multimodal scenarios.

In summary, while existing studies provide a valuable foundation, a systematic and targeted English communication strategy for Jiang'an Bamboo Carving remains underdeveloped. This study will build upon these three core theories, integrating the unique craftsmanship and cultural characteristics of Jiang'an Bamboo Carving. It aims to address the gap in translation strategies for niche ICH, explore multimodal adaptation pathways, and ultimately facilitate a shift from "language conversion" to "cultural meaning reconstruction."

3. THEORETICAL FOUNDATION: THE "INTERMEDIARY VALUE" OF TRANSLATION IN ICH COMMUNICATION

3.1. Cultural Translation Theory: Dynamic Balance between Domestication and Foreignization

The Cultural Translation Theory proposed by Venuti classifies translation into two strategies: "domestication" and "foreignization." "Domestication" emphasizes aligning with the expression habits of the target culture to lower cognitive thresholds through analogy and simplification. "Foreignization" advocates preserving the uniqueness of the source culture and conveying cultural differences through defamiliarized expressions. The translation of Jiang'an Bamboo Carving requires a dynamic balance. Excessive "domestication"-such as simply translating "君子" as "a man of virtue" or "天人合一" as "harmony between humanity and nature"-will lose the uniqueness of cultural symbols. On the other hand, excessive "foreignization"-directly transliterating terms like "junzi" and "tianren heyi" without annotations-will lead to cognitive gaps due to cultural estrangement.

Therefore, for core cultural symbols (e.g., "plum blossom," "bat"), a hybrid strategy of "foreignization + annotation" should be adopted to preserve the uniqueness of source culture terminology while explaining their connotations through contextual supplements. For philosophical concepts (e.g., "harmony between humanity and nature"), a "domesticating analogy" strategy is suitable, transforming abstract concepts into life experiences perceptible in the target culture (such as the Western concepts of "sustainable development" and "respect for nature"), thereby achieving an organic integration of "cultural particularity" and "cognitive universality." This balance is not merely a technical choice at the linguistic level but also a respect for cultural diversity-it neither forces the source culture into the framework of the target culture nor refuses dialogue with the target audience due to cultural differences.

3.2. Thick Translation Theory: Eliminating Cultural Discount through Contextual Supplementation

Proposed by Appiah, Thick Translation Theory advocates transcending literal translation and providing "meaning scaffolds" for target audiences to understand culture-loaded content through methods such as "in-text annotations," "cultural associations," and "contextual descriptions." The "cultural discount" in cross-cultural communication of ICH mostly arises from the target audience's lack of familiarity with the source cultural context. For example, foreign audiences' negative perception of "bats" (associated with darkness and evil in Western culture) and their indifferent perception of "plum blossoms" (lacking the symbolic association of "blooming in severe winter") are not inherent semantic obstacles of the symbols themselves, but rather the failure of translation to explain the cultural logic behind the symbols.

Thick Translation Theory requires not only conveying "what it is" (the literal meaning of symbols) but also explaining "why it is so" (the cultural origin of symbols) and "what it means" (the emotional value of symbols). For Jiang'an Bamboo Carving, the application of Thick Translation is not about simply adding annotated texts, but constructing a "symbol-culture-emotion" chain. For instance, when translating "bat patterns," it is necessary not only to state that "bats symbolize auspiciousness in Chinese culture" but also to explain the origin of the "homophonic culture" (the Chinese character for "bat" (蝠, fú) has the same pronunciation as the character for "good fortune" (福, fú)) and link it to the universal human emotion of "yearning for a happy life." Through such multi-layered contextual supplementation, "culturally specific symbols" are transformed into "relatable meaning symbols," fundamentally reducing the impact of "cultural discount" on communication effectiveness.

3.3. Narrative Translation Theory: From Factual Transmission to Emotional Connection

Narrative Translation Theory emphasizes that "story-based texts" are more communicative and memorable than "fragmented facts." Seymour Chatman points out that a complete narrative consists of four core elements: "characters, conflict, process, and resolution." This structure conforms to human cognitive habits-through the sense of involvement from characters, the tension from conflict, the rhythm from process, and the sense of value from resolution, it transforms the audience from "passive receivers" to "active participants," ultimately forming a deep emotional connection.

In the English translation of Jiang'an Bamboo Carving, the value of Narrative Translation Theory lies in resolving the "abstract dilemma of craftsmanship and philosophy." Existing texts mostly list the steps of "bamboo yellow turning technique" as "peeling the bamboo yellow layer-flattening-carving," with no description of the craftsman's "dialogue with the material" or interpretation of the philosophical thoughts behind "carving along the bamboo grain." As a result, craftsmanship is reduced to "technical operations" and philosophy is dismissed as "meaningless habits." In contrast, Narrative Translation constructs a "characterized" meaning system, transforming abstract craftsmanship and philosophy into perceptible stories: treating "bamboo" as a character with a lifelike quality (e.g., "a 3-year-old Moso bamboo"), regarding "craftsmen" as carriers of cultural inheritance (e.g., "inheritors adhering to traditions"), taking "material transformation" as conflict (e.g., "the conversion of ordinary bamboo into a work of art"), and using "philosophical practice" as the resolution (e.g., "harmonious coexistence of nature and human creation"). This translation strategy not only makes the craftsmanship process more vivid but also allows philosophical thoughts to be naturally presented through the logic of the story, achieving a leap from "cognitive understanding" to "emotional recognition."

4. DILEMMAS IN ENGLISH TRANSLATION OF JIANG'AN BAMBOO CARVING: AN ATTRIBUTION FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF CULTURAL TRANSLATION

4.1. "Zero-Context" Translation of Cultural Symbols: Symbolic Misunderstanding and Meaning Disconnection

The cultural value of Jiang'an Bamboo Carving largely relies on the expressive functions of traditional cultural carriers such as "plant symbols" and "landscape imagery." The plum blossom symbolizes "perseverance in adversity," bamboo represents "the humility and resilience of a man of virtue," and the bat implies "auspiciousness and good fortune." The meanings of these symbols do not stem from their inherent natural properties but are endowed by traditional Chinese culture over the long term. However, existing English translations render "梅花" as "plum blossom" and "蝙蝠" as "bat," without explaining the cultural logic behind the symbols or linking them to comparable meaning systems in the target culture. Consequently, foreign audiences either misunderstand the symbols as "ordinary natural images" (e.g., plum blossom = a winter flower) or develop cognitive biases due to the negative associations of the symbols in the target culture (e.g., bat = evil).

This "zero-context" translation essentially neglects the "particularity of cultural symbol expression." The meaning of cultural symbols is not fixed but depends on a specific cultural context; translating symbols in isolation from their context will inevitably lead to the loss or distortion of meaning. From the perspective of English translation, to help foreign audiences understand the value of these symbols, it is essential to supplement context through Thick Translation: not only explaining the cultural connotations of the symbols but also clarifying the origins of these connotations (e.g., homophony, historical allusions) and linking them to universal human emotional needs (e.g., admiration for

resilience, yearning for good fortune), thereby transforming the symbols from "unfamiliar cultural markers" into "relatable emotional carriers."

4.2. "Technicalized" Translation of Craftsmanship and Philosophy: Superficial Cognition and Philosophical Vacuum

The value of Jiang'an Bamboo Carving's craftsmanship lies not only in the complexity of its techniques such as "bamboo yellow turning" and "inlaying" but also in the "craftsmanship spirit" and "ecological wisdom" embodied within it. A craftsman's choice to "carve along the bamboo grain" is not a technical compromise but a practice of the "harmony between humanity and nature" philosophy, which emphasizes "respecting the inherent nature of materials." The long "3-month production cycle" not only reflects the difficulty of the craftsmanship but also conveys the traditional craft ethics of "slow work yields fine products." However, existing English translations tend to "technicalize" craftsmanship and philosophy: translating "bamboo yellow turning technique" as "peeling the bamboo inner layer," which merely describes the action without explaining the uniqueness of "flattening thick bamboo yellow into paper-thin material"; and literally translating "天人合一" as "harmony between humanity and nature" without transforming it into understandable meaning through specific scenarios. As a result, foreign audiences' cognition of craftsmanship is limited to "the complexity of steps," while their understanding of philosophy remains completely vacant.

From the perspective of translation theory, the root cause of this dilemma is the "narrowing of translation objects"-confining translation to "quantifiable material properties and observable craft steps" while ignoring the translation of "unquantifiable craftsmanship spirit and abstract philosophical thoughts." In fact, for ICH, the latter constitutes the core of cultural value: craftsmanship is the "form," and philosophy is the "soul." Translating only the "form" while neglecting the "soul" will reduce ICH to a "soulless technical demonstration." Therefore, English translation must transcend the limitations of "technicalization" and "materialize" the craftsmanship process and philosophical thoughts through Narrative Translation-transforming "carving along the bamboo grain" into "a dialogue between the craftsman and the material," and converting the "3-month cycle" into "a testament to the time invested in craftsmanship spirit." In this way, abstract philosophy is naturally presented through the story of craftsmanship, achieving a translation effect that "integrates form and spirit."

4.3. "Factualized" Structure of Translated Texts: Emotional Disconnection and Ineffective Communication

Existing English texts of Jiang'an Bamboo Carving mostly adopt a "terminology + data" factual structure, such as "Jiang'an Bamboo Carving: a national intangible cultural heritage with a history of over 300 years, made of bamboo inner layer, featuring carving techniques." This structure lacks the "sense of character" and "rhythm" of narrative, with no mention of the craftsman's personal experience or the process of material transformation. As a result, the texts are dull and boring, making it difficult to arouse emotional resonance among foreign audiences-audiences can only remember fragmented information such as "bamboo" and "carving," failing to form a comprehensive understanding of bamboo carving and even less likely to develop a willingness for sustained attention.

From the perspective of communication effectiveness, the flaw of such "factualized" texts lies in ignoring "humanity's inherent preference for stories." Compared with abstract data and terminology, stories are more capable of stimulating the audience's sense of involvement and memory. For English translation, the choice of text structure is not merely a formal issue but a strategy reflecting "audience orientation": Western culture places greater emphasis on individual stories and emotional experiences, and prefers to understand cultural products through narratives centered on "people" and "processes." Therefore, the English translation of Jiang'an Bamboo Carving must shift from a "factual structure" to a "narrative structure." By constructing "stories of material transformation" and "stories of

craftsmen's perseverance," the audience is transformed from "onlookers" to "participants in the story," ultimately achieving a communication upgrade from "cognitive memory" to "emotional recognition."

5. RECONSTRUCTION OF TRANSLATION STRATEGIES: FROM LANGUAGE CONVERSION TO CULTURAL MEANING REGENERATION

5.1. "Thick Translation" of Cultural Symbols: Eliminating Cognitive Barriers and Realizing Meaning Transmission

The key to translating cultural symbols lies in "contextual supplementation" and "emotional connection." Through the "multi-level explanation" of Thick Translation, "culturally specific symbols" are transformed into "relatable meaning symbols." From an operational perspective, this translation strategy involves three core steps: first, identifying the "core cultural connotation" of the symbol-stripping away superficial natural properties and extracting the underlying value orientation (e.g., the "resilience" of the plum blossom, the "auspiciousness" of the bat); second, supplementing the "source of cultural context"-explaining the logic behind the formation of the connotation (e.g., homophony, historical allusions, philosophical thoughts) to avoid misunderstandings caused by the audience's lack of cultural background; third, linking to "universal human emotions"-connecting the cultural connotation to the emotional needs familiar to the target audience (e.g., admiration for resilience, yearning for good fortune), thereby transforming the symbol from an "unfamiliar cultural marker" into a "perceptible emotional carrier."

The value of Thick Translation doesn't lie in "increasing text length" but in eliminating the "incommensurability" of cultural symbols through precise contextual supplementation. It preserves the uniqueness of the source culture (e.g., not simplifying "君子" to "a man of virtue" but explaining the multi-faceted connotations of "君子" through annotations) while providing a "meaning scaffold" for the target audience, ultimately achieving a balance between "cultural authenticity" and "audience adaptability." For Jiang'an Bamboo Carving, the Thick Translation of cultural symbols is the key to resolving "symbolic misunderstanding" and serves as the foundation for foreign audiences to grasp its cultural value.

5.2. "Narrative Translation" of Craftsmanship and Philosophy: Building Emotional Connections and Deepening Cognitive Depth

Craftsmanship and philosophy are the "hidden carriers" of Jiang'an Bamboo Carving's cultural value. The core of their translation is to overcome the "abstract dilemma" and transform "invisible craftsmanship processes" and "imperceptible philosophical thoughts" into "perceptible stories" through a narrative structure. Theoretically, this translation strategy relies on the "character-conflict-process-resolution" framework of narratology to achieve transformation in three dimensions: first, transforming "materials" and "craftsmen" into "narrative characters"-endowing bamboo with a "lifelike quality" (e.g., "a 3-year-old Moso bamboo") and shaping craftsmen as "practitioners of cultural inheritance" (e.g., "inheritors adhering to traditions") to arouse the audience's sense of involvement; second, converting "craftsmanship difficulties" and "philosophical practices" into "narrative conflicts"-taking "the transformation of ordinary bamboo into a work of art" as the craftsmanship conflict and "the craftsman's respect for the inherent nature of materials" as the philosophical conflict, using the tension of conflict to stimulate the audience's interest; third, turning "craft steps" and "philosophical connotations" into a "narrative process"-making the craftsmanship process concrete through detailed descriptions (e.g., "boiling bamboo to soften it," "carving along the bamboo grain") while allowing philosophical thoughts to be naturally presented through the

craftsman's actions (e.g., "not forcing modifications to the material" embodying the "harmony between humanity and nature").

The essence of Narrative Translation is "meaning reconstruction"-no longer regarding craftsmanship and philosophy as independent "technical information" or "abstract concepts," but integrating them into the logical chain of the story. In this way, the audience naturally perceives the uniqueness of the craftsmanship and the profundity of the philosophy while understanding the story. This translation strategy not only enhances the attractiveness and memorability of the text but also enables foreign audiences to move from "superficial cognition" to "deep recognition," truly understanding the cultural value of Jiang'an Bamboo Carving as an "integration of craftsmanship and philosophy."

5.3. "Context-Adaptive Translation" In Multimodal Scenarios: Optimizing Communication Efficiency and Expanding Audience Scope

Cross-cultural communication of ICH involves diverse scenarios (e.g., offline exhibitions, short videos, cultural and creative products). Different scenarios have distinct communication objectives and audience attention characteristics, so translation strategies must be "context-adaptive"-adjusting the "level of detail" and "format" of the text according to the characteristics of each scenario to achieve precise matching of "scenario-text-audience." Theoretically, this context-adaptive translation follows two core principles: first, "detail adaptation"-offline exhibition labels need to be concise and concise (core information + short annotations) to avoid affecting the viewing experience with overly long texts; short video subtitles/voiceovers should be colloquial and fragmented (short sentences + exclamatory sentences) to convey emotions in conjunction with images; cultural and creative product detail pages need to be comprehensive and rich (stories + emotional value + usage scenarios) to stimulate purchasing intentions. Second, "form adaptation"-integrating multimodal elements (e.g., icons, pop-ups, 3D models) to assist translation: using "symbol icons + keywords" (e.g., a plum blossom icon with the annotation "perseverance") in exhibitions to simplify cognition; adding "pop-up annotations" in short videos to supplement cultural context without interrupting the narrative rhythm; adopting "interactive translation" (clicking on symbols to view detailed explanations) in virtual exhibitions to enhance audience engagement.

The value of context-adaptive translation lies in "improving communication efficiency"-abandoning the "one-size-fits-all" translated text and instead optimizing the presentation form and information density of the text according to the communication characteristics of the scenario and the cognitive habits of the audience. This ensures that the translation not only meets the communication needs of different scenarios but also maximally adapts to the acceptance habits of the target audience. For Jiang'an Bamboo Carving, this strategy is the key to realizing the transition from "niche communication" to "mass communication" and serves as an important guarantee for the practical implementation of translation strategies.

6. CONCLUSION

From the perspective of English translation professionals, the cross-cultural communication dilemma of Jiang'an Bamboo Carving essentially stems from the "narrowing of translation functions"-regarding translation as mere "language conversion" while ignoring its core value as a "cultural interpreter" and "meaning reconstructor." Therefore, the key to reconstructing its English translation strategy lies in a conceptual upgrade: taking Cultural Translation Theory as guidance to clarify the "cultural intermediary" positioning of translation; using Thick Translation and Narrative Translation Theory as tools to realize the transformation from "factual transmission" to "meaning interpretation"; and taking context-adaptive translation in multimodal scenarios as the path to optimize communication efficiency and audience coverage.

The value of this translation strategy is not limited to the cross-cultural communication of Jiang'an Bamboo Carving but also provides theoretical reference for similar ICH. The cultural value of ICH lies not solely in its material carrier or craft steps but in its attribute as a "collection of cultural meanings." Therefore, translation must transcend "linguistic technical choices" and rise to the strategic height of "cultural meaning reconstruction." Through precise contextual supplementation, vivid narrative construction, and scenario-based form optimization, the cultural value of ICH can cross the barriers of language and culture, truly realizing the transformation from a "local heritage" to a "global cultural resource."

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This paper is funded by Undergraduate Innovation Fund Project (S202310622091).

REFERENCES

- [1] Al-Jenaibi, M. S. (2022). Overcoming constraints in literary translation: A case study of rendering Saud Al-Sanousi's *Saq Al-Bambu* into English. *Culture and Communication*, 2022(10). <https://doi.org/10.1515/culture-2022-0159>
- [2] Appiah, K. A. (1993). Thick Translation. In L. Venuti (Ed.), *The translation studies reader* (pp. 403-410). Routledge.
- [3] Cronin, M. (2003). *Translation and globalization*. Routledge.
- [4] Du, G. L., & Xiong, S. (2015). Protection and inheritance of traditional bamboo carving craftsmanship in Southern Sichuan. *China Cultural Forum*, (8), 163–166.
- [5] Hu, X. (2013). A study of idiom translation strategies between English and Chinese [ResearchGate version]. ResearchGate. <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/274661305> (Note: Original publication details not available; cited from ResearchGate)
- [6] Lü, J., & Yang, J. T. (2021). Investigation on the current situation and innovative development strategy of Jiang'an bamboo carving. *Art Education Research*, (23), 33–35.
- [7] Song, J. H. (Ed.). (2017). *Annual report on the protection and development of intangible cultural heritage in China (2017)*. Social Sciences Academic Press.
- [8] Venuti, L. (1995). *The translator's invisibility: A history of translation*. Routledge.
- [9] Wang, M. R. (2024). Research on the Japanese communication strategy of Jiang'an bamboo carving from the perspective of translational communication. *World Bamboo and Rattan Letters*, *22*(1), 64–70.