

Research on English Translation Strategies of Intangible Cultural Heritage Tourism IP: Chinese embroidery

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Abstract

In the context of the “going out” of Chinese culture and the high-quality development of China's cultural tourism, Chinese embroidery, as a representative intangible cultural heritage of China and a core genre of traditional oriental needlework, has become the core carrier of national cultural IP international dissemination. However, up to now, the English translation of Chinese embroidery promotional texts still has some problems such as insufficient cultural connotation transmission, inconsistent translation of craft terms, blunt language expression, and unclear communication goals, which seriously affect its international communication effect. Therefore, guided by Skopos Theory and Functional Equivalence Theory, this study uses literature research, case analysis and text analysis methods, systematically analyzes the current situation and problems of Chinese embroidery into English on the basis of sorting out the development status of China's intangible cultural heritage tourism IP and the artistic characteristics of Chinese embroidery, and proposes optimization strategies from three levels, focusing on culture-loaded words translation and craft terms translation: at the cultural level, through cultural compensation and functional equivalence, the connotation of traditional Chinese culture is completely conveyed; at the language level, the standardization of craft terminology and the accuracy and conciseness of expression are realized, and the functional equivalence of the translation is achieved; at the communication level, it is guided by overseas audiences, and the translation method is flexibly adjusted according to the purpose of cultural tourism communication to improve the effect of external publicity. This research will help standardize the English translation of Chinese embroidery and China's intangible cultural heritage tourism IP, provide theoretical reference and practical reference for intangible cultural heritage external publicity translation, and promote excellent traditional Chinese culture to better go global.

Keywords

Intangible Cultural Heritage; Cultural Tourism IP; Chinese Embroidery; English Translation Strategies.

1. Introduction

1.1. Research Background

China's intangible cultural heritage (ICH) embodies the wisdom and traditional spirit of the Chinese nation (Shen, 2023). In the global promotion of Chinese culture, ICH serves as a key resource for shaping national image and advancing cultural tourism. Chinese embroidery, an integral part of the traditional Oriental needlework system, represents the fusion of diverse ethnic techniques and aesthetic ideals. It has gained international recognition through initiatives such as "ICH + cultural tourism" and global cultural exchanges. However, the English translation of its promotional materials faces significant challenges due to linguistic asymmetry and cultural differences (Hu, 2024). Without a deep understanding of the source culture, the

true essence of Chinese embroidery may be lost, limiting international audiences' ability to grasp its cultural value and impeding the global dissemination of China's ICH.

1.2. Research Significance

1.2.1. Theoretical Significance

Guided by Skopos Theory and Functional Equivalence Theory, this study applies functional translation approaches to the English translation of Chinese embroidery. It enriches theoretical research on ICH translation and expands the application of functional theories to traditional Oriental crafts. By focusing on Chinese embroidery, this research also offers a theoretical foundation and methodological reference for translating other ICH-related cultural tourism content.

1.2.2. Practical Significance

As Chinese culture "goes global," the translation of ICH terms is crucial not only for linguistic transmission but also for the cross-cultural communication of ICH knowledge, cultural identity, and heritage diversity (Wang, 2022). This study identifies practical issues in current English translations of Chinese embroidery and proposes actionable strategies through systematic analysis. These findings aim to improve the accuracy, readability, and communicative effectiveness of translations used in official publicity, cultural products, international exhibitions, and tourism promotion, thereby supporting the global outreach of Chinese embroidery and related ICH.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Main Concepts

2.1.1. Intangible Cultural Heritage

Intangible cultural heritage includes traditional craftsmanship, performing arts, rituals, and knowledge passed down through generations, forming an essential part of cultural identity. Chinese embroidery, as a traditional handicraft, exemplifies these values and represents a culturally significant heritage worthy of preservation and international promotion.

2.1.2. Cultural Tourism IP

Cultural tourism IP refers to a culturally distinctive and commercially scalable brand that integrates tourism experiences with heritage resources. China's ICH cultural tourism IP, with Chinese embroidery at its core, builds a nationally and internationally recognizable brand through cultural interpretation, creative transformation, and global communication.

2.2. Theoretical Framework

2.2.1. Skopos Theory

Skopos Theory, developed by German functionalist scholars including Reiss, Vermeer, Manttari, and Nord, posits that translation is a purposeful act. The core principle is that the translation purpose determines the strategies used. It emphasizes three rules: the skopos rule (the highest), coherence rule (intra-textual coherence for the target reader), and fidelity rule (inter-textual coherence with the source text) (Fan, 2019). In ICH translation, cultural communication and tourism promotion are the primary purposes guiding translation choices.

2.2.2. Functional Equivalence Theory

Proposed by Nida, Functional Equivalence Theory stresses that translation should achieve the closest natural equivalent to the source text in terms of meaning and effect, rather than literal correspondence. The goal is for target readers to respond to the text in a way similar to source language readers (Huang, 2020). In translating Chinese embroidery, this theory supports the

accurate transmission of cultural connotations, artistic features, and technical details to ensure effective cross-cultural communication.

2.3. Chinese Embroidery

Chinese embroidery is a traditional craft with a history of thousands of years. Originating from folk needlework, it integrates regional techniques and aesthetics, most notably in the "Four Great Embroideries": Suzhou, Hunan, Guangdong, and Sichuan. Its themes range from nature and mythology to folk customs and auspicious symbols, reflecting the Chinese philosophy of harmony and conveying values such as blessing, loyalty, and filial piety. As a representative ICH, Chinese embroidery holds both national and global cultural significance.

2.4. Research Gaps

International research on heritage translation emphasizes functionality, cross-cultural effectiveness, and audience reception. Domestic studies have explored culture-loaded terms, translation strategies, and theoretical applications in ICH. However, systematic research on the English translation of Chinese embroidery from the perspective of cultural tourism IP communication remains limited. Existing practices often lack audience differentiation, reducing communication effectiveness (Xiong, 2025). While individual embroidery styles have been examined, there is insufficient attention to the transmission of overall cultural connotations and standardization of craft terminology in external publicity. Moreover, few studies integrate Skopos Theory and Functional Equivalence Theory to propose comprehensive translation strategies. This research seeks to address these gaps.

3. Research Design

3.1. Research Question

What are the current status and existing problems in the English translation of culture-loaded words in Chinese embroidery promotional texts?

What are the current status and existing problems in the English translation of craft terms in Chinese embroidery promotional texts?

Based on Skopos Theory and Functional Equivalence Theory, what optimization strategies should be adopted to enhance the cultural communication effect of Chinese embroidery English translations?

3.2. Research Method

3.2.1. Data Collection

The data are collected from authentic external publicity texts of Chinese embroidery, including official promotional materials, official website introductions, international exhibition brochures, cultural and creative product descriptions, and cultural tourism promotion documents.

3.2.2. Data Analysis

Guided by the teleology and functional equivalence theory, this study uses text analysis to select the real propaganda texts such as official Chinese embroidery publicity materials, cultural tourism promotion manuscripts, and international exhibition brochures as the analysis objects, and carries out the analysis of targeted texts. Focusing on the two core elements that carry the cultural connotation and technical characteristics of Chinese embroidery, this study systematically sorts out and clarifies the problems of lack of cultural connotation, confusion in terminology translation, and inaccurate expression in the current English translation. Combined with the communication demands of Chinese embroidery cultural tourism IP, this paper deeply explores the causes of problems from the dimensions of cultural differences and

audience acceptance, and then explores targeted translation optimization strategies accordingly, and effectively improves the quality of Chinese embroidery English translation texts on the basis of taking into account cultural authenticity and readability of the target language, and helps to improve the cross-cultural communication effect of its cultural tourism IP.

4. Analysis of Chinese Embroidery Translation

4.1. Strategies of Culture-loaded Words Translation

As an important carrier of culture, language has witnessed the evolution of civilization of various ethnic groups and reflected the differences in spiritual temperament, way of thinking, customs and habits of various ethnic groups. Because of this, translators should not be limited to the linguistic transformation of text content, but also pay attention to the excavation and interpretation of cultural connotations. (Nie, 2022) Culture-loaded words are the core carrier of Chinese embroidery's cultural connotation, bearing rich national history, traditional aesthetics and symbolic meanings. They are the key and difficult point in the English translation of publicity texts. Guided by Skopos Theory and Functional Equivalence Theory, the translation of these words must balance cultural authenticity and cross-cultural acceptability. However, the current translation practice is often flawed by cultural connotation loss due to simple literal translation. For example, auspicious pattern like "Dragon and Phoenix Bringing Prosperity" is closely tied to Chinese traditional beliefs. A literal translation without any cultural supplements will only let overseas audiences understand the literal meaning, making them unable to perceive the implied symbolic meanings of auspiciousness and loyalty. In contrast, the core creative concept of Chinese embroidery, "using needles as pens and thread as ink". It achieves functional equivalence in both form and connotation, and accurately conveys the artistic essence of Chinese embroidery. There are also sayings about embroidery patterns, such as "Mandarin Duck", which is the Chinese official duck. In Chinese culture, "mandarin ducks" are often used as a metaphor for a loving couple. But in the West, "mandarin duck" is just an ordinary animal and does not have any figurative meaning. Therefore, in the translation of such works, "mandarin duck" is not directly translated as "mandarin duck", but as "lovebird". (Hu, 2016) For culture-loaded words with strong national characteristics, a combination of literal translation and brief annotation works better. We can take "Double Happiness" as an example. We can add a note that it is a traditional Chinese symbol for marriage joy after the literal translation. In general, the translation of culture-loaded words in Chinese embroidery publicity texts should flexibly adopt cultural compensation, domestication and foreignization. We need to maximize cultural retention while ensuring smooth communication, and truly convey the cultural charm of Chinese embroidery to overseas audiences.

4.2. Strategies of Craft Terms Translation

Craft terms reflect the unique technical characteristics of Chinese embroidery, and their standardized translation is the basic guarantee for the accurate international dissemination of embroidery techniques. Chinese embroidery has a diverse and complex term system covering stitches, color matching and tools, so its English translation requires strict accuracy, unity and standardization. However, the current English translation of craft terms in publicity texts has prominent problems. First, the same term has inconsistent translations. For example, satin stitch, a basic needle technique, is translated as silk stitch or smooth stitch in different texts, which confuses overseas audiences' professional cognition. Second, the translation is inaccurate. People often use general words to translate specific terms, which leads to the loss of technical details. Third, there is a lack of professional standardization, and a unified suffix system has not been established for different types of terms. To solve these problems, the translation of craft terms should follow the principles of accuracy and unity under the guidance

of translation theories. Authoritative departments need to unify translation standards: use “stitch” as the suffix for needle techniques and “technique” as the suffix for processes like color matching, thus building a standardized term system. For complex terms, we can adopt explanatory translation. We can take mixed stitch as an example. It can be translated as mixed stitch, which forms rich color gradations by overlapping different threads. Meanwhile, we should adjust the translation according to communication needs. For general cultural tourism publicity, we can simplify professional explanations. For professional exchanges, we need to accurately convey the complete technical connotations. The standardized translation of craft terms lays a solid linguistic foundation for the international communication of Chinese embroidery, and effectively improves the professional level of its cultural tourism IP translation.

5. Conclusion

5.1. Major Findings

The international dissemination of China's intangible cultural heritage faces three primary challenges: first, the profound cultural connotations and specialized terminology of heritage items create significant translation difficulties; second, current communication efforts remain fragmented with low thematic concentration; third, Western media prejudice has resulted in negative reporting that damages the international image of China's ICH (Gao, 2019). Specifically, the English translation of Chinese embroidery promotional materials suffers from insufficient transmission of cultural connotations, inconsistent terminology, rigid language expression, and ambiguous communication purposes, which collectively hinder the global reach of China's ICH cultural tourism IP.

Skopos Theory and Functional Equivalence Theory provide valuable theoretical guidance for addressing these challenges. The former emphasizes that translation purpose determines strategy selection, while the latter focuses on target readers' receptive responses. Accordingly, this study proposes a three-dimensional translation approach: at the cultural level, implementing cultural compensation to bridge connotative gaps; at the linguistic level, standardizing craft terminology using “stitch” and “technique” as core suffixes to ensure accuracy and consistency; at the communicative level, adopting audience-oriented strategies that adjust translation methods according to specific purposes. This integrated framework aims to enhance the quality of Chinese embroidery English translation and promote effective international dissemination of China's intangible cultural heritage.

5.2. Limitations

This study focuses exclusively on Chinese embroidery, which limits the scope of research on China's diverse intangible cultural heritage (Li, 2023). Future research should expand to include other ICH categories and incorporate empirical methods such as audience feedback analysis to enhance the practicality and relevance of translation strategies. As the internationalization of China's ICH dissemination accelerates, the study of its English translation will remain increasingly important. Future work should aim to establish a more systematic and comprehensive translation framework that contributes to the global spread of China's excellent traditional culture.

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