

Translation and Communication Strategies of Culture-specific Items in the *Yellow Emperor's Inner Canon*

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Abstract

Taking Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) classic *Yellow Emperor's Inner Canon* as the research object, this study conducts a systematic analysis of translation strategies of culture-specific items and the effect of their overseas communication from a perspective of the theory of translation dissemination. Through comparing and analyzing the translation methods of culture-specific items in *Yellow Emperor's Inner Canon*, this paper also investigates how translators balance the cultural and linguistic acceptability by adopting certain English translation strategies while preserving the theoretical frameworks and cultural specificities of this TCM classic. Findings indicate that the translation of Chinese medical texts can be approached from three dimensions: linguistic, cultural, and communicative. Accurate translation and effective communication of TCM culture can be achieved through regionalized translation, the establishment of TCM terminology repositories, the incorporation of a modern medical hermeneutic framework, and the implementation of innovative multimodal communication strategies.

Keywords

Culture-specific items; *Yellow Emperor's Inner Canon*; translation strategies; communication strategies

1. Introduction

1.1 The Background and Importance of the *Yellow Emperor's Inner Canon*

The *Yellow Emperor's Inner Canon* was compiled during the Western Han Dynasty during the Warring States Period. It is the earliest existing medical classic in China and is hailed as the "Supreme Canon of Medicine". Its content centers around "Man-nature correspondence", integrating the theories of Yin-Yang and Five Elements, as well as the concepts of *Zang-Fu* (Below Chinese terms are marked using the Chinese Pinyin system, and their meanings will be described in the appendix) organ networks and meridian physiology, to establish the foundation of the traditional Chinese medical theory system. As the source of traditional Chinese medicine theory, the *Yellow Emperor's Inner Canon* is not only a medical classic but also a comprehensive document covering multiple cultures such as philosophy, astronomy, calendar, and ethics. Its cultural value holds significant guidance for modern medicine and health management.

The first complete English translation of *the Yellow Emperor's Inner Canon*, published by Ilza Veith in 1945, marked the official entry of Chinese medical classics into the international arena. Since the beginning of the 21st century, with the rapid progress of the internationalization of traditional Chinese medicine, the number of translations

of *Yellow Emperor's Inner Canon* has increased significantly, covering various types of editions such as academic ones (e.g., Unschuld's academic version) and popular ones (e.g., Li Zhaoguo's interpretational version), becoming an important medium for Westerners to understand Chinese medical culture. Nevertheless, due to its complex cultural connotations and the specificities of ancient Chinese language expression, translation and dissemination face the challenge of "cultural incongruence". For instance, concepts such as "Qi" and "meridians" are often misinterpreted as "mystic energy" or "anatomical structures", making it difficult to convey the true cultural connotations. Therefore, it is important to focus on the translation of culture-specific items in the process of conveying the meaning of the original text.

1.2 Research Background and Objectives

During the process of the communication of traditional Chinese culture overseas, the translation of its specific items faces three major challenges: semantic incompatibility, the lack of standardization of terms, and conflicts in cultural imagery. This study aims to deeply analyze the *Yellow Emperor's Inner Canon* and explore how to precisely handle the translation of Chinese culture-specific items in English translation, in order to achieve effective cultural dissemination. By adopting the method of literature research and comparing and analyzing the advantages and disadvantages of different translations in overseas communication, this study proposes targeted optimization strategies for cultural communication. These strategies aim to more effectively solve the problems of translation flexibility and comprehensibility faced by traditional Chinese culture in overseas communication, and further enhance the rich value of Chinese culture in overseas communication.

In the scope of translation research on culture-specific items, this study mainly selects Professor Li Zhaoguo's translation of the *Yellow Emperor's Inner Canon* as the research object. Given Professor Li's profound attainments in the field of traditional Chinese medicine and his deep insight into the language and academic background of traditional Chinese medicine, his translation better reduces the possibility of misunderstanding the culture of traditional Chinese medicine.

In terms of communication effect, this study focuses on the versions translated by Unschuld and Luo Xiwen. Their translations have shown different significant effects in different regional cultural backgrounds, so they can be used as research objects for in-depth analysis.

2. The Analysis of the Culture-specific Items in the *Yellow Emperor's Inner Canon*

2.1 Definition and Characteristics of Culture-specific Items

Culture-specific items were formally proposed by Spanish translator and translator theorist JF Aixelá (1996). Their core definition encompasses two dimensions: Firstly, it refers to "cultural concepts, symbols, or phenomena in the source language that are lost in cross-linguistic conversion due to the lack of corresponding concepts or value cognition differences in the target language system"; Secondly, it emphasizes that "the heterogeneity of text status stems from differences in parameters such as ideology, pragmatic norms, or usage frequency". In the context of traditional Chinese medicine (TCM), such items not only carry medical knowledge but also embody complex cultural factors such as ancient philosophy, astronomy, and ethics. For instance, "Yin-Yang" is not only a medical concept but also a core idea of Taoism, embodying the dialectical thinking of opposition and unity. Shi Weiping pointed out from the perspective of memetics that TCM culture-specific items have "strong cultural genes" and need to be disseminated through cross-cultural replication. For example, "Qi" should be restructured in the target language as "vital energy" rather than a simple translation (Weiping Shi, 2014).

The essential characteristics of traditional Chinese medicine are reflected in its cultural substrate rooted in Chinese classical philosophy. This cultural gene is concretized through the systematic cultural items in classics such as the *Yellow Emperor's Inner Canon*. Data statistics show that the cultural items in *Yellow Emperor's Inner Canon* present the following features: noun categories account for the largest proportion, including person designations (e.g., "Qibo"), physiological and pathological terms (e.g., "*Tian gui*"), etc.; verb-object categories account for the least proportion, such as "*Deng tian*" which literally means "ascending to the throne" and metaphorically refers to the principle of drug combination between monarch and minister; adjective categories are the fewest, focusing on attribute description (e.g., "*Shen ling*" does not refer to supernatural beings but rather represents the physical trait of "clever and perceptive") (Xuan Zhang, 2008).

The complexity and uniqueness of such cultural symbols form the context barriers for the cross-cultural communication of traditional Chinese medicine. Research has confirmed that semantic deviations caused by mistranslation of terms can lead to a 38% decrease in readers' acceptance (Li Yin, 2017). Therefore, doing a good job in the translation of culture-specific items has become a core proposition for the construction of the external discourse system of traditional Chinese medicine.

2.2 The Function of Culture-specific Items in the *Yellow Emperor's Inner Canon*

2.2.1 Theoretical Construction Function

According to Aixela's definition, culture-specific items have dual attributes in the context of traditional Chinese medicine: they are carriers of medical knowledge and containers of cultural genes. Taking "Five Elements" as an example, it is not a physical entity but a symbolic system. Through the interrelated and complementary relationships of "Wood, Fire, Earth, Metal, Water", it constructs a dynamic connection between the human body and nature. For instance, "Liver belongs to Wood, Heart belongs to Fire", corresponding to the functions of Zang Fu to the natural attributes, forming a three-domains theoretical relationship of "Five Elements - Zang Fu - Emotions". Shi Weiping's meme theory points out that such concepts need to be disseminated genetically through "cross-cultural replication" - for example, translating "Qi" as "vital energy" instead of "Qi", to avoid misinterpretation due to semantic omission (Weiping Shi, 2014).

2.2.2 Cultural Metaphorical Function

The language of traditional Chinese medicine often employs metaphor as a rhetorical device to ingeniously convey its profound and rich cultural connotations. Metaphor is not merely a rhetorical skill or a linguistic phenomenon; it constitutes one of the core ways of human thinking and profoundly influences the cognitive process, becoming an indispensable participant. The concept of "Five Elements" is analogized as "Wood, Fire, Earth, Metal, Water" to represent the functions of the liver, heart, spleen, lung, and kidney, thereby constructing a physiological logical chain of "The liver belongs to Wood → governs free flow" (Yuanyuan Liu, Huixian Qi, & Diping Chen, 2025). This analogy is not a mechanical correspondence but is achieved through functional dynamic association through a symbolic system. The translation by Ilza Veith of "*Zhi wei bing*" as "treating before illness" is close to the literal meaning but loses the philosophical connotation of "preventing minor problems from escalating into major ones"; while Li Zhao Guo's supplementary annotation "preventive treatment aligning with natural rhythms" more fully conveys the cultural connotations and implications.

2.2.3 Clinical Guidance Function

The clinical practice of traditional Chinese medicine highly relies on the operationalized interpretation of culture-specific items. For instance, "Six Pathogenic Factors" (wind, cold, summer-heat, dampness, dryness, and fire) not only describe the causes but also embody the dynamic view of the interaction between the environment and the human body. As "*Feng sheng ze dong*", it links "Pathogenic wind" with symptoms such as convulsions and vertigo, guiding clinical practice to adopt the therapy of dispelling wind. Li Zhao Guo translates "*Liu yin*" as "Six Pathogenic Factors", which retains the characteristics of traditional Chinese medicine while explaining its connotation of "external pathogenic factors" through annotations, avoiding the misleading influence of the Western medical concept of "pathogen".

This is also indispensable in the dimension of traditional Chinese medicine treatment, The principle of "*Fu zheng qu xie*" encompasses the preventive medical thought of "the healthy qi is within and the pathogen cannot invade", emphasizing that the own physiological functions and disease resistance is the key to resisting the invasion of pathogenic factors. It embodies the unique concept of traditional Chinese medicine that "prevention is better than cure" and "preventing disease before it occurs". When comparing the translation versions, it is found that the domestication translation "strengthen immunity" can convey the meaning of enhancing the body's resistance to fight against diseases relatively intuitively and is easy for readers to accept, but it narrows down the philosophical connotation of "overall disease resistance" in TCM. The "*Zheng qi*" emphasized by TCM is not merely equivalent to immunity in modern medicine; it is a comprehensive concept covering multiple aspects, such as the functions of internal organs and balance of Yin-Yang, referring to the body's functional activities and disease resistance, and recovery capabilities. The foreignization translation "*Fu Zheng Qu Xie*", through transliteration and annotation, retains the cultural characteristics and connotations of TCM, and better conveys cultural integrity (Haiou Pan, 2024).

3. The English Translation Strategy of the Culture-specific Items in the *Yellow Emperor's Inner Canon*

3.1 Language Dimension: Literal Translation + Free Translation

To achieve the effect of linguistic literacy, in the process of translating the culture-specific items in traditional Chinese medical classics, the combination model of direct translation for core terms and contextual paraphrasing is regarded as an effective translation strategy.

The advantage of direct translation is that it can retain to some extent the cultural traits and ethnic characteristics of the source language, ensuring the accuracy and faithfulness of the source language, and enabling readers to understand the cultural features of the source language. For example, the WHO unified “Yin-Yang” into “Yin-Yang” to ensure consistency in global academic exchanges (Xiao Ye & Hongxia Zhang, 2017). Yang Mingshan translated the culture-specific items of the theory of luck, such as translating “*Ping qi*” into “The normal solar term” (Haiou Pan, 2024).

However, excessive literal translation of some semantic contents may lead to the loss of their connotations. For instance, “Qi” is directly translated as “Qi” in English, which is wrongly interpreted as “mysterious energy” in the Western context (Mengdi Qiao, 2024). Shi Weiping, in her meme theory, proposed to reconstruct “Qi” as “vital energy” and add functional annotations (such as “propelling, warming, and defending life energy”), comprehensively interpreting the deep connotations of the original language (Weiping Shi, 2014). Therefore, free translation plays a crucial role in conveying the cultural connotations and meanings of the original text.

Interpretation can break free from the constraints of the original form and flexibly adopt the expression methods familiar to the readers to convey the deep meaning of the original text, thereby achieving effective overseas communication of culture and being applicable to the cognitive adaptation of clinical operation terms. For example, translating “Liver Wood overacting on Spleen Earth” as “Liver Wood overacting on Spleen Earth”, presenting the relationship of generation and restriction among the five elements dynamically with “overact” (Shujuan Zhai, 2025).

However, excessive translation borrowing can lead to the loss of cultural imagery. For instance, Veith translated “*Jing luo*” as “channels”, thereby losing its uniqueness as “energy pathways”. Empirical evidence shows that such translation methods have led to a 42% decrease in readers’ recognition of the uniqueness of traditional Chinese medicine theory (Li Yin, 2017).

Therefore, in different situations, combining literal translation with free translation can not only maintain the fidelity of the original text but also ensure the readability and acceptability of the translation. One can also adopt the approach of adding annotations to make the overall content more detailed and understandable.

3.2 Communication Dimension: Annotations and Explanations

Annotations are not merely supplementary to translation but also cognitive bridges for cultural communication between different cultures. They play a crucial role in resolving the translation difficulties of culture-specific items in the *Yellow Emperor's Inner Canon*. Through annotations, translators can provide readers with additional information, helping them understand the difficult-to-translate cultural items and expressions in the original text and enabling them to correctly and deeply comprehend the original work. For instance, in the Unschuld translation, he used a full three pages of “Five Elements” annotation to dissect the essence of its “symbolic system” and corrects the misinterpretation of “material element theory” by Western readers (Yulian Ke & Xin Cheng, 2023).

For the sake of effective communication, when it comes to the translation of unique TCM items and concepts, a method of transliteration followed by explanations can be adopted. For instance, “*Tian gui*” is translated as “*Tian gui*”, the modern medical concept (similar to gonadotropin-releasing factor, a reproductive micro-substance) can be associated through a footnote (Lei Li, 2024). For proper nouns with profound cultural connotations, literal translation followed by explanations can be employed. For clinical operation terms, a free translation followed by explanation can be used, such as “*Fu zheng qu xie*” which can be translated as “reinforce healthy qi to eliminate pathogenic factors”, and additional explanations can be provided in cases (Xuan Zhang, 2008).

According to the supplementary text theory (Honglin Que & Ya Liu, 2023), a comparative analysis is conducted on the usage of different reader-oriented annotations:

(1) In-text parenthetical notes - Li Zhaoguo (2005) - meridians (energy pathways) - Strong immediacy, but interfering with the smoothness of reading

(2) Footnote at the end of the text - Unschuld (2011) - Appendix 3 footnotes - Academic rigor, but increasing the reading load

(3) Side-notes with illustrations – Ilza Veith (1949) - Illustrating the comparative anatomical diagram of meridians - Multi-modal assistance, but high cost

(4) Digital extension - Zhai Shujuan (2024) - Embedding QR code links to “Arts of Meridians AR Model” - Immersive experience, but requiring technical support

When dealing with the theories of traditional Chinese medicine, elements of traditional culture, historical allusions, and characters that might be obscure and difficult to understand for readers, translators should conduct thorough research and provide clear explanations. The aim is to help readers overcome comprehension barriers and deeply grasp the essence of the original works. At the same time, this process also broadens readers’ knowledge horizons regarding traditional Chinese medicine and Chinese culture. This translation strategy of deepening understanding through adding annotations, known as “thick translation”, aims to build an understanding platform for the readers of the translation with abundant background information. The translation is embedded in a rich and multi-dimensional context, thereby cultivating an attitude of acceptance and respect towards foreign cultures and achieving a clear understanding of TCM theory.

3.3 Cultural Dimension: Introduction and Interpretation of Cultural Background

The translations of many cultural classics incorporate the characteristics and cultural tone of the respective countries. Especially for the ancient medical text *Yellow Emperor’s Inner Canon*, almost all its contents require the translator to first translate the classical Chinese into vernacular Chinese, and also need to retain the original meanings of the culture-specific items in the English translation. However, most culture-specific items are difficult to directly translate their intrinsic meanings through literal translation or free translation. Therefore, with a rigorous academic attitude, it is quite important to introduce relevant cultural and historical backgrounds during the translation process to help overseas readers better understand the cultural connotations and deep meanings contained in the word meanings.

When using simple and understandable language to help readers understand and accept the content, it should also be able to directly support the understanding of the original text. For example, if “*Zhi wei bing*” is directly translated as “treating before illness”, it will be easily simplified to the concept of preventive medicine. Luo Xiwen’s translation version explains its philosophical connotation through the preface, derived from the Taoist thought of “non-action governance”, which emphasizes following the natural laws to maintain the balance of the body (Yi Liu, 2019).

When presenting cultural background information, translators can adopt various methods such as insertions, footnotes, and appendices, and make flexible choices based on specific circumstances. At the same time, translators should also pay attention to the interpretation strategies of cultural background information, and through appropriate expression methods and language styles, make the cultural background information integrate with the original content and complement each other. When elaborating on relevant cultural background, cultural taboos should also be noted to avoid unnecessary misunderstandings in understanding. With the rapid development of intelligent technology, hyper-text resource annotations can also be adopted. Zhai S developed a terminology database (TCM Terms Wiki) in the popular science translation version. By scanning the terms, readers can obtain cultural background information (e.g., “Five Elements” being related to the original text of *Shang Shu*), and modern interpretation (e.g., “Heart governing the spirit and wisdom” corresponding to the neuro-endocrine regulatory mechanism) (Shujuan Zhai, 2024).

The introduction of cultural background not only greatly facilitates the comprehension and application of traditional Chinese medicine by overseas readers but also shortens the distance of cultural exchange and enhances the international influence of traditional Chinese medicine culture.

Through the appropriate use of these strategies, translators can more precisely convey the semantic essence and cultural connotation of the original text, thereby facilitating the global communication and exchange of TCM classics and enhancing the international community’s cognition and understanding of TCM culture.

4. Oversea Communication of Culture-specific Items of the *Yellow Emperor’s Inner Canon*

From the perspective of overseas communication, the standardization of terms as a test for the communication effect of translations overseas has effects and evaluation value. Jiang Jibiao pointed out, “As an important part of the theoretical system of TCM, the standardized translation of TCM terms is the premise and key to promoting the overseas communication of TCM culture” (Jibiao Jiang, 2023). And the communication effect of the translation in each region can be evaluated by the recognition and acceptance of the translation by the market group. In Wang Yunwei’s book,

also proposed that the specific method of investigating the effect of communication is based on market research (Yunwei Wang, 2020). In addition, the *Yellow Emperor's Inner Canon* is not only the carrier of cultural communication, but also the key to academic research. Therefore, in order to comprehensively analyze and evaluate the overseas communication effect of culture-specific items in different translations, an evaluation model from the three perspectives of 'standardization-market-academic influence' is proposed.

4.1 Evaluation System for Communication Effect

In terms of standardization, the degree of translation standardization is evaluated based on whether the terms are consistent with the international standards of WHO or ISO (such as "Yin-Yang" being unified as Yin-Yang); in the market aspect, the acceptance and market country/region of readers are quantified through Amazon ratings and reader questionnaires (such as comprehension and cultural identification); in the academic dimension, the influence and teaching penetration rate of *Yellow Emperor's Inner Canon* in overseas regions are evaluated based on the citation frequency of SCI/SSCI papers, the mention rate in academic conferences or the number of learners on MOOC platforms (such as the translation by Li Zhaoguo being adopted in a course at Harvard University).

According to these three aspects, the empirical evaluation of the communication effect of representative translations is analyzed, and the influencing factors of the communication effect are analyzed, and optimization suggestions are proposed.

4.2 Analysis of the Communication Effects of Representative English Translations

Firstly, four typical translations were selected for comparative study:

Ilza Veith's translation (1949), a full translation with a focus on literal translation and having a strong academic nature;

Li Zhaoguo's translation (2005), adopting a strategy of transliteration and annotations, aims to balance academic rigor and popularization.

Urschuld's translation (2011), a type of exegesis-based translation with detailed annotations for comprehensive understanding;

Luo Xiwen's translation (2018), with a prominent strategy of domestication and making the language more accessible.

Based on the data comparison, it was found that the Unschuld translation version achieved the best performance in culture-specific items of standardized terminology and SCI citation frequency, indicating its superiority in academic rigor and research influence; Li Z's translation version performed the best in items of reader acceptance, suggesting that it is more popular among the general readers; while the Weiss translation version and Luo X's translation version performed relatively mediocre in all indicators (Jie Li, 2015).

The factors that may account for the differences in the above-mentioned communication effects could be as follows (Jichang Jiang, 2013):

- A. The game between cultural fidelity and readability: The Weiss translation retains cultural heterogeneity through literal translation, but the comprehension threshold is high (the questionnaire shows that the comprehension rate of non-native English readers is only 58%);
- B. Functional differences in the use of annotations: Li Zhaoguo's translation adopts in-text brief annotations with appendix detailed annotations, resulting in satisfaction rates of 78% for professional readers and 82% for general readers;
- C. Regional communication preferences: Europe and America tend to prefer academic translations - Unschuld, while Southeast Asia prefers domesticated translations - Luo Xiwen.

Through the analysis of the communication effects of different translations, this study reveals the profound influence of different translation strategies on the cross-cultural communication effect. Translators can build a translation system for mass communication on the basis of international standardization of terms, combined with understandable annotation and regional religious culture. So as to promote the precise translation and deep identification of traditional Chinese medicine culture in the global context.

In particular, attention should be paid to the translation of culture-specific items, because it is the main carriers of traditional Chinese medicine culture, and also the most important information and the most prone to mistakes in the process of translation and communication. Professor Li Zhaoguo's translation is able to reflect the importance of the translation of culture-specific items, which makes readers understand more accurately and achieves acceptance and

satisfaction from the majority of readers. Therefore, in the process of translation and dissemination of culture-specific items, we need to not only ensure the unity and accuracy of core terms, but also take into account the needs and preferences of different reader groups.

4.3 Suggestions for Optimization of Communication Strategies

In order to effectively promote and communicate TCM classics, especially those culture-specific items in them, the following optimization suggestions are suggested: the development of a dynamic annotation system, regionalized translation strategies, and the combination of standardization and flexibility.

4.3.1 Standardization of Terminology and Optimization of Annotations

Core culture-specific terms can be uniformly translated according to the terminology standards of the World Health Organization (WHO), such as “Yin-Yang” and “Five Elements”. For other types of derivative terms, flexible handling can be carried out based on various cultural customs. For example, “Five movements and six qi” can be transliterated and accompanied by medical explanations to meet the needs of different readers.

At the same time, in combination with the application of technology, translators can use “QR Code Extended Reading” technology and add interactive annotations for culture-specific items, so as to enhance readers’ understanding and memory of them (Shujuan Zhai, 2025). Readers only need to scan the QR code to watch related animations, videos, or graphic explanations. For example, when explaining the term “Meridian Circulation”, we could provide a dynamic animation to visually demonstrate the circulation path and functions of meridians in the human body, thereby helping readers to better understand this complex concept.

4.3.2 Regionalized Translation Strategies

Taking into account the differences in cultural backgrounds and reader demands among various regions, translators can adopt different translation strategies based on the target markets.

For the markets in Europe and America, the translator can adopt the strategy of enhancing academic annotations. This approach precisely caters to the reading preferences and professional demands of the readers in this region. When dealing with the culture-specific items and theories in the *Yellow Emperor’s Inner Canon*, the translator can provide detailed academic annotations. Besides straightforward translations, the annotations also deeply analyze the cultural connotations and scientific principles behind them, ensuring that the translated version accurately conveys the original meaning of the traditional Chinese medicine classics while meeting the rigorous and professional requirements of the academic community in Europe and America.

For the Southeast Asian market, translators can make full use of the method of cultural analogy to ingeniously integrate cultural differences and enhance the local acceptance of the translation. Considering that the Southeast Asian region is deeply influenced by Buddhist culture, the translator can make a comparison between the “Five Elements” theory in traditional Chinese medicine classics and the “Five Aggregates” concept in Buddhism. Through an easy-to-understand explanation, it helps the target readers overcome cultural barriers, deeply understand the theories of traditional Chinese medicine, and also stimulates their interest and identification with traditional Chinese medicine culture.

4.3.3 Innovative Communication Methods

In terms of educational cooperation, actively seek partnerships with platforms like Coursera to jointly develop and promote the MOOC course of the *Yellow Emperor’s Inner Canon*. These courses will not merely consist of textual explanations but will incorporate rich video cases, using vivid materials such as real records of famous doctors’ diagnoses and practices of traditional Chinese medicine health preservation to enable scholars to intuitively experience the charm of traditional Chinese medicine culture. At the same time, by combining case videos (such as real records of famous doctors’ diagnoses) with an interactive terminology database, this terminology database not only provides accurate translations and explanations of professional terms in traditional Chinese medicine but also allows scholars to gain a deeper understanding of the interrelationships between terms and the overall framework of traditional Chinese medicine theory through interactive methods such as clicking.

In terms of policy support, by leveraging the international cooperation opportunities brought by the “Belt and Road Initiative” Center for Traditional Chinese Medicine Overseas, we actively promoted the inclusion of the translation of the *Yellow Emperor’s Inner Canon* in UNESCO’s *Memory of the World Heritage* list. This initiative not only recognizes the international value of traditional Chinese medicine culture but also represents an important step in

promoting the spread of traditional Chinese medicine culture worldwide. Through cultural exchanges and cooperation with countries along the “Belt and Road”, we will promote the English translation of the *Yellow Emperor’s Inner Canon* to more countries and regions, enhancing the understanding and respect of the international community for traditional Chinese medicine culture, and contributing the wisdom and strength of traditional Chinese medicine to building a community with a shared future for mankind.

Through the effective combination of the above communication strategies, we can effectively promote the culture-specific items of the *Yellow Emperor’s Inner Canon*, facilitate more overseas readers to understand and learn Chinese medicine, and improve the acceptability and communication effect of culture-specific items.

5. Conclusion

This study reaches the following findings: A. in the combination of the unification of culture-specific items and translation methods, direct translation into helps retain cultural characteristics, but additional annotations are still needed to assist readers in understanding. For instance, Li Zhao Guo’s translation adopts the approach of “phonetic translation + detailed annotations”, which not only maintains the consistency of the terms but also makes it easier for ordinary readers to understand. B. In order to achieve better dissemination effect of systematic annotation and interpretation of culture-specific items, more emphasis should be placed on the profound expressions of TCM theory. Metaphors like “spring growth and summer development” need to be explained in a more intuitive way, like adding dynamic demonstrations through videos with hyperlinks. C. The translation effects vary from region to region. While Unschuld’s translation is popular in the academic circles of Europe and America due to its detailed annotations, Luo X’s translation scores higher in the Southeast Asian market because of its naturalistic translation. This shows that different regions have different understandings and preferences for English translations, as well as various dissemination channels, of the *Yellow Emperor’s Inner Canon*.

In conclusion, though this paper has achieved some initial results in the study of translation strategies and communication effects of culture-specific items in the *Yellow Emperor’s Inner Canon*, there is still some space for more comprehensive and profound research on it and other TCM classics alike. Future studies should expand the methods and contents to promote further research in this direction.

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Appendix (Source Text, Target Text)

Number	Source Text in Chinese Character	Source Text in Chinese Pinyin	Target Text
1	脏腑	<i>Zang-Fu</i>	Internal organs
2	天癸	<i>Tian gui</i>	
3	登天	<i>Deng tian</i>	ascending to heaven
4	神灵	<i>Shen ling</i>	
5	治未病	<i>Zhi wei bing</i>	preventing a disease before it arises
6	风胜则动	<i>Feng sheng ze dong</i>	
7	六淫	<i>Liu yin</i>	Six Pathogenic Factors
8	扶正祛邪	<i>Fu zheng qu xie</i>	reinforce healthy qi to eliminate pathogenic factors
9	正气	<i>Zheng qi</i>	healthy qi
10	平气	<i>Ping qi</i>	balanced movements
11	经络	<i>Jing luo</i>	Meridians and collaterals