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Current Status of External Publicity Translation of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Jing'an, Jiangxi

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Abstract

The external publicity translation of intangible cultural heritage (ICH) is a crucial component of the "Going Global" strategy for Chinese culture. As one of the regions in Jiangxi Province with the richest ICH resources, Jing'an County boasts multiple provincial-level ICH items, including the Jing'an black pottery making technique, the Jing'an Dagu Chanshan folk song, and the Jing'an Madeng dance, all of which hold great potential for international communication. However, the current ICH external publicity translation in Jing'an is still in its infancy, facing multiple challenges such as a shortage of qualified translators, inconsistent terminology, loss of cultural information, and limited communication channels. From an interdisciplinary perspective combining communication studies and translation studies, and drawing on Lasswell's "5W" communication model, this paper systematically reviews the current state of ICH external publicity translation in Jing'an, analyses its main problems, and proposes countermeasures from the dimensions of translation standardisation, expansion of multimodal communication pathways, and cultivation of professional translators, with a view to providing a reference for the international dissemination of Jing'an's ICH.

Keywords

Jing'an ICH; external publicity translation; international communication; multimodal translation; 5W model

1. Introduction

Intangible cultural heritage is the cultural gene of a nation, carrying its cultural memory and values, and constitutes a significant symbolic capital for both the nation and the region. Driven by the "Going Global" strategy and the Belt and Road Initiative, research on ICH external publicity translation has shown an increasing trend. As a vital vehicle for national image building and international communication, the strategic value of external publicity translation is becoming ever more prominent. Gao Angzhi (2019) pointed out that the key points and difficulties in the external publicity translation of ICH lie in the selection of textual content, translation of ICH names, and handling of culture-specific terms, which make ICH translation distinct from general text translation.

Jiangxi Province is rich in ICH resources, with 88 national-level projects and 560 provincial-level ones. Jing'an County, as one of the areas with the most substantial ICH accumulation in the province, possesses over 170 ICH items. However, compared to regions such as Guizhou, Zhejiang, and Guangxi, where research on ICH external publicity translation is relatively mature, the research in Jiangxi remains weak. Some scholars have reviewed the translation and introduction studies of Jiangxi's ICH and found that research perspectives are often confined to translation strategies, lacking systematic examination of communication effects (Liu, 2022). There is considerable room for expansion in the study of Jing'an's ICH external publicity translation.

Against this backdrop, this paper takes Jing'an ICH as its research object, and after outlining its ICH resource profile, employs Lasswell's "5W" communication model (communicator, content, medium, audience, effect) as an analytical framework to systematically investigate the current situation and problems of Jing'an ICH external publicity translation. The study aims to fill the gap in research on Jing'an ICH external publicity translation and to provide theoretical grounding for subsequent translation practice and curriculum reform.

2. Overview of Jing'an's ICH Resources

2.1 Overall Structure of Jing'an ICH

Jing'an County boasts abundant and diverse intangible cultural heritage resources. To date, Jing'an has had items such as the "Jing'an Madeng Dance, Jing'an Xianghua Heshang Dance, Jing'an Chahuadeng" (traditional dance categories), the "Jing'an Dagu Chanshan folk song" (folk music), and the "Dragon and Phoenix Auspiciousness" colourful painting and carved rubbing technique (folk art) inscribed on the provincial-level ICH list. In addition, the Jing'an County People's Government has announced two batches of county-level ICH lists comprising 29 items. In December 2023, the eighth batch of county-level representative ICH projects was announced, covering seven items including Jing'an paper-cutting, Jing'an black tea making technique, Jing'an Tang Dynasty tea infusion, Jing'an folk remedies, and Jing'an white tea tea-ceremony performance. In June 2026, the ninth batch of county-level ICH list was also released. Jing'an Nanshan Flower Drum has also been included in the fourth batch of Jiangxi provincial-level ICH list.

2.2 Representative ICH Projects

The Jing'an black pottery making technique is one of the most representative ICH items in Jing'an. In November 2017, it was inscribed on the fifth batch of the Jiangxi provincial-level ICH list. Jing'an black pottery is an important survival of the eggshell pottery technique from the Neolithic period in the middle and lower reaches of the Yangtze River. According to the Jing'an County Gazetteer, a large number of pottery vessels and shards were excavated from ancient cultural sites such as Zhengjia'ao, Xiapai, Pingtouling, and Yejiyuan in Jing'an, dating back approximately 4,000 years. In 2011, an eggshell black pottery gu (dating back about 4,500 years) unearthed at the Laohudun site in Jing'an had an eggshell thickness of 0.3 mm and a minimum body thickness of only 0.4 mm—such thinness nearly challenges the limits of human manual skill, and this traditional pottery technique carries the genetic symbols of Chinese civilisation. In 2014, Wu Yingfang, a provincial-level ICH inheritor, successfully refired an ancient wood-fired eggshell black pottery gu. In 2019, he pushed the limits again, producing an eggshell black pottery piece with a minimum thickness of just 0.2 mm.

Jing'an Dagu Chanshan folk song (also known as Jing'an Chanshan Drum) is a form of collective labour song in which one person beats a drum and leads the singing while others join in chorus; it is included in the Collection of Chinese Folk Songs · Jiangxi Volume. Its inheritor, Liao Rengui, was named a representative inheritor of the fourth batch of provincial-level ICH in 2021.

The Jing'an Madeng dance is a commemorative New Year activity said to have originated in the Tang Dynasty, with a history of at least 200 years in Jing'an. It is mainly distributed in Zaodu Town and Gaohu Town of Jing'an County, and currently features the "Six-Horse Yang Family Lantern" performance. The dance is followed by singing, with the tune being Han-style. Its inheritor, Yang Xingwan, was also named a provincial-level ICH representative inheritor in 2021.

In addition, other items such as Jing'an Chahuadeng (mussel shell lantern), Jing'an Xianghua Heshang dance, and Jing'an Nanshan Flower Drum each have their own distinctive features, collectively forming the rich cultural landscape of Jing'an's ICH.

3. Analysis of the Current Situation of Jing'an ICH External Publicity Translation

3.1 Translation Subjects and Talent Pool

From the perspective of communication subjects, the main force for Jing'an ICH external publicity translation is not yet well established. At present, the task is mainly led by local government departments, with limited involvement from university translation programmes. Overall, Jing'an still lacks a stable professional translation team, and both the quantity and quality of translators fall short of the growing demand for external publicity.

3.2 Translation Content and Quality

In terms of translation content, the following prominent problems exist:

First, inconsistent and non-standardised terminology. This is a common issue in ICH external publicity translation. For example, for "Jing'an black pottery making technique", local media have rendered "black pottery ICH" as "Non-material cultural heritage" rather than the official expression. Similar problems are also prominent in other parts of Jiangxi—research has pointed out that English translations of Jiangxi's ICH folklore suffer from uneven quality, frequent errors, and chaotic nomenclature (Liu, 2022). The inconsistency of terminology not only affects the professionalism of communication but also hinders understanding by international audiences.

Second, significant loss of cultural information during translation. ICH translation differs from general text translation in that its core lies in cultural transmission rather than mere linguistic conversion. Jing'an black pottery carries profound cultural connotations—its "black as lacquer" colouration is rooted in the ancient Chinese cosmological concept of "reverence for black" and ritual traditions; its thin-walled craftsmanship embodies the principle of "fine material and skilled workmanship" from the Kaogongji (The Records of Examination of Crafts). However, in existing external publicity texts, these cultural meanings are often reduced to technical descriptions, and the deeper significance of cultural symbols is not effectively conveyed. Similarly, the Hakka dialect features in the Dagu Chanshan folk song and the historical narrative behind the Madeng dance also face the risk of cultural information being "discounted" in translation.

Third, insufficient translation materials. The available translation materials for Jing'an ICH are extremely limited. At present, English-language materials on Jing'an ICH are few and far between, with only a handful of bilingual picture books (such as the Jing'an black pottery feature in the "Tell Hometown Stories in English" series) and sporadic news reports. Compared with the vast volume of over 170 ICH items in Jing'an, the existing translation materials are far from sufficient to support systematic international communication.

3.3 Communication Media and Channels

The external communication channels for Jing'an ICH are narrow, and multimodal practice is severely insufficient. Currently, reliance is placed on offline cultural tourism events, media reports, and WeChat official accounts—limited channels with narrow coverage and a lack of systematic strategy. Multimodal translation emphasises the conversion of non-verbal modes such as visual and auditory elements. The texture and patterns of Jing'an black pottery, the rhythm and sound effects of the Dagu Chanshan folk song, and the formations and movements of the Madeng dance are precisely the core ICH elements that require dissemination through short videos, AR/VR, digital museums, and other new media. However, existing external publicity pays little attention to these non-textual elements, and digital empowerment remains a blank. Research suggests that building a multimodal corpus platform is the key to breaking the deadlock, but Jing'an urgently needs to catch up in this area to overcome the predicament of "difficulty in penetrating mainstream overseas cultural fields due to a single carrier".

3.4 Audience Targeting and Communication Effects

Jing'an ICH external publicity translation lacks clear audience targeting and effect evaluation mechanisms. Current practice has not systematically investigated the cultural backgrounds, cognitive habits, and information needs of overseas audiences, and the content is often produced without reference to the audience, making precise reach difficult. Scholars such as Yang Rongguang have suggested establishing audience feedback mechanisms to optimise translation strategies—an idea worth adopting. In terms of communication effects, only Jing'an black pottery has gained some international attention due to its inheritor's participation in the Japan Osaka Expo, while the overseas influence of other ICH projects remains minimal. The absence of evaluation mechanisms means that quality improvement of external publicity translation lacks data support and clear direction.

4. Analysis of the Causes of Problems in Jing'an ICH External Publicity Translation

4.1 Insufficient Policy Support and Resource Investment

Although the national and Jiangxi provincial governments have issued a series of ICH protection policies, special policies and funding for the subfield of external publicity translation remain insufficient. Jing'an County, despite its abundant ICH resources, has limited investment in external publicity translation. The establishment of professional

translation teams, construction of multimodal corpora, and development of digital communication platforms all require substantial financial and human resources.

4.2 Weak Interdisciplinary Integration

ICH external publicity translation is inherently interdisciplinary, involving translation studies, communication studies, cultural studies, digital technology, and other fields. However, current research and practice are often confined to a single disciplinary perspective and lack effective interdisciplinary integration. Long Yuhong and Fu Dongmei (2024) also noted that ICH external publicity translation from the perspective of translation mediation needs to be combined with communication theories, and that integration in this regard remains insufficient in current research.

5. Countermeasures and Suggestions

5.1 Establish a Standardisation System for Jing'an ICH External Publicity Translation

First, a unified standard for translating the names and terminology of Jing'an ICH projects should be established as soon as possible. This could be done by referring to the framework of the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage and combining it with the actual situation of Jing'an's ICH to develop category-specific translation norms. Second, translation quality assessment criteria should be established, evaluating translation quality systematically from dimensions such as accuracy, cultural adaptability, and readability. Third, drawing on the experience of Guangxi, Hubei, and other regions, a Chinese-English parallel corpus for Jing'an ICH could be constructed.

5.2 Expand Multimodal Communication Pathways

Jing'an ICH should make full use of digital technology to build a multimodal communication system. In the visual mode, short-video platforms (such as TikTok) can be used to display the black pottery making process and Madeng dance performances; in the auditory mode, original audio of the Dagu Chanshan folk song can be preserved with subtitled translations; for immersive experiences, the application of AR/VR technologies in ICH display can be explored. Reference can be made to the experience of digital empowerment in building multimodal ICH corpus platforms (Liu, 2023) to promote the digital transformation of Jing'an ICH communication.

5.3 Strengthen the Training of Professional Translation Talents

The core bottleneck for Jing'an ICH external publicity translation is talent. The advantages of university disciplines and specialties should be fully utilised, and university-county cooperation should be used to cultivate interdisciplinary talents who possess both translation competence and ICH knowledge. Drawing on the successful experience of the "family-institution" inheritance model in Jing'an black pottery, ICH inheritors could be connected with translation teachers and students to achieve an organic integration of "skill transmission" and "cultural translation".

5.4 Establish Audience-Oriented Communication Mechanisms

Based on the 5W communication model, systematic surveys of overseas audiences for Jing'an ICH should be conducted to identify their cultural backgrounds, information needs, and media preferences. On this basis, a stratified communication strategy should be formulated—adopting differentiated translation strategies and communication methods for different audience groups such as general tourists, professional scholars, and cultural tourism markets. At the same time, a communication effect evaluation mechanism should be established to continuously optimise translation and communication plans through data analysis.

6. Conclusion

Jing'an ICH is an important component of China's outstanding traditional culture, and the quality of its external publicity translation directly affects the effectiveness of Jiangxi culture "going global". Currently, Jing'an ICH external publicity translation faces multiple dilemmas, including a shortage of translation talents, non-standardised terminology, loss of cultural information, and limited communication channels. The root causes lie in lagging theoretical research, insufficient policy support, and weak interdisciplinary integration. To overcome these difficulties, systematic measures are needed, including establishing translation standardisation systems, expanding multimodal communication pathways, strengthening talent cultivation, and building audience-oriented mechanisms.

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