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A Study on the English Translation of Zhejiang Maritime Intangible Cultural Heritage from the Perspective of "Three Livelihoods of ICH"

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Abstract

Against the backdrop of the strategy of "promoting Chinese culture globally", the international communication of intangible cultural heritage (ICH) is of great significance for enhancing China's cultural soft power. As a major province rich in maritime cultural resources, Zhejiang boasts a diverse range of maritime ICH with profound connotations, yet its translation practice is plagued by such problems as the weakening of cultural connotations and the ambiguity of functional attributes. Taking the concept of the "Three Livelihoods of ICH" (Production, Life, Ecology) as the theoretical perspective, this paper, on the basis of sorting out the research achievements of ICH translation at home and abroad, explores the application path of this concept in the English translation of Zhejiang maritime ICH. Through the analysis of typical cases such as Zhoushan Fishermen's Work Songs and Shengsi Fishing Ballads, and with the English translation practice of the fishing ballad East, West, South and North Winds as a concrete example, this paper demonstrates the role of the "Three Livelihoods of ICH" translation strategy in realizing the coordinated communication of cultural inheritance and ecological value from three dimensions: life expression, production function and ecological awareness. The study holds that this translation strategy helps break through the traditional descriptive translation model, enabling Zhejiang maritime ICH to be more effectively understood and communicated as a "living culture" in the international context.

Keywords

Zhejiang maritime culture; intangible cultural heritage; translation research; Three Livelihoods of ICH; cultural inheritance; ecological protection

1. Introduction

1.1. Research Background

Maritime cultural heritage is a treasure jointly created by humans and the earth in the long history of the past. Protecting and inheriting maritime cultural heritage is a

common responsibility of humanity and also an effective way to enhance China's soft power. As an important medium for cultural communication across borders, translation plays an irreplaceable role in the process of ICH “going global”. How to accurately present the cultural connotations of ICH in translation and avoid solidifying it into a static symbol has become an important issue that needs to be urgently addressed in current ICH research and translation practice.Since the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, General Secretary Xi Jinping has repeatedly emphasized the importance of cultural heritage protection, put forward the concept of “bringing cultural heritage to life", and stressed that "we must properly handle the relationship between protection and development and focus on continuing the historical context of cities”. In 2017, the General Office of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and the General Office of the State Council issued the Opinions on Implementing the Project of Inheriting and Developing Excellent Traditional Chinese Culture, which clearly proposed to promote Chinese culture to better go global and strengthen the construction of the international communication capacity of traditional culture. The 14th Five-Year Plan for Cultural Development in 2021 further emphasized the need to innovate the communication methods of ICH, promote the deep integration of ICH with modern life, and enhance the international influence of Chinese culture. Against this background, the traditional ICH translation model, which is mainly descriptive or textual, can no longer meet the practical needs of cultural communication in the new era.

1.2. Research Purposes and Significance

In 2017, Zhejiang’s ICH protection department put forward the concept of the “Three Livelihoods of ICH” (Production, Life, Ecology) at the 9th Zhejiang · China ICH Expo. This concept provides a new idea for ICH protection and communication, emphasizing that ICH should be integrated into real life, serve social production, respect the ecological environment, and highlight the value of its living inheritance and sustainable development.

Against this policy and practical background, introducing the “Three Livelihoods of ICH” concept into the research on the English translation of Zhejiang maritime ICH has important theoretical and practical value. Taking the “Three Livelihoods of ICH” translation strategy as the research perspective, combined with the cultural characteristics and specific translation examples of Zhejiang maritime ICH, this paper explores how to realize the coordinated promotion of cultural inheritance and ecological protection in translation, aiming to provide a more holistic and practice-oriented translation path for the international communication of Zhejiang maritime ICH.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Research Status at Home and Abroad

In recent years, with the continuous advancement of ICH protection work, ICH translation has gradually become an important research direction in the fields of translation studies, cultural studies and cross-cultural communication. In the international academic community, ICH translation is closely related to such topics as “traditional cultural communication”, “cross-cultural exchange” and “global circulation of cultural heritage”. Elsevier Science, the world’s largest publisher and a recognized high-quality academic publishing company, has been searched by the author for literature data related to ICH in the past decade. The data shows that scholars from various countries have attached great importance to the research on ICH in recent years.

Foreign scholars mostly discuss the issue of ICH communication from the perspective of cultural heritage protection and cross-cultural exchange. Some scholars use relevant theories to explore the cultural communication in the English translation of ICH in Shaanxi and other regions, emphasizing the relationship between cultural understanding and communication effects. From the perspective of communication and dissemination theories, Duan Wenting (2022) analyzed the relationship between ICH text translation and cultural communication. Eugene Nida's functional equivalence theory, which emphasizes the functional realization of the translated text in the target language culture, provides a theoretical basis for the "meaning prior to form" approach in ICH translation. Richard Kurin pointed out from the perspective of cultural anthropology that ICH has distinct practical and community attributes, and its communication should respect the lifestyle and cultural context of the cultural subject, a view that provides important enlightenment for ICH translation research. It can be seen that international attention to ICH is not limited to single-language translation, but also involves the protection of linguistic diversity and the tension between globalization and local cultural identity. The research path has expanded from traditional translation theories to the interweaving of multiple perspectives such as eco-translation studies and pragmatics, and the research has gradually expanded from simple language conversion to “contextual meaning communication”.

Table 1. Statistics on the number of papers related to “Intangible Cultural Heritage”published on Science Direct

Year	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Number of Papers	52	65	78	95	110	132	168	205	256	312	348

Systematic research on ICH translation in the domestic academic community began after the adoption of the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage in 2003. Some scholars have introduced eco-translation studies into the discussion of ICH English translation, emphasizing the dynamic balance between the translated text and the original cultural ecology and the target audience’s context,

which has a certain theoretical depth in cross-linguistic communication research. In recent years, eco-translation studies have become a popular research framework. Some scholars have examined the problems and strategies of ICH cultural communication abroad from the perspective of eco-translation studies, emphasizing the maintenance of the balance and sustainability of cultural ecology in the context of globalization. Song Junhua (2006) pointed out that ICH has the characteristics of livingness, inheritance and sociality, and its translation should not be limited to the textual level, but should focus on the overall presentation of cultural practice. Yuan Li (2006) further proposed that ICH protection should adhere to the principles of "living protection" and "holistic protection", providing theoretical support for avoiding decontextualization in ICH translation. Some studies focus on the current situation of ICH English translation in specific regions or types, pointing out problems such as non-standard terminology translation, insufficient transmission of cultural connotations and lack of professional competence of translators, and putting forward specific countermeasures. In terms of translation strategies, Liu Anhong (2013) discussed the functional transformation of ICH translation from the perspective of cultural adaptation and tourism communication, emphasizing that the translated text should serve the construction of cultural communication and social identity.

In the field of maritime ICH research, relevant achievements are relatively few and mostly concentrated in the field of cultural protection and development. Qu Jinliang (2003) was the first to propose that attention should be paid to the rescue and protection of maritime cultural heritage, pointing out that maritime culture is an important part of traditional Chinese culture. Xu Junkang (2017) systematically analyzed the regional, living and religious cultural characteristics of Zhejiang maritime ICH, and believed that maritime ICH is deeply rooted in the production and living practices of coastal people. Jia Quanjv (2003) classified and analyzed the characteristics of Zhoushan maritime ICH in his research, pointing out its prominent characteristics of diversity, openness and ecological dependence, but rarely involved translation issues.

On the whole, the existing research has laid an important foundation for ICH translation and Zhejiang maritime ICH research, but there are still two deficiencies: first, most of the ICH translation research stays at the level of linguistic or cultural explanation, lacking a holistic perspective. As an interdisciplinary issue, the theoretical resources of ICH translation are still mainly concentrated within translation studies or from the perspective of communication, lacking a more systematic theoretical construction and empirical evaluation system. At the same time, the number of high-level core papers on this topic is still relatively small. Second, there are few achievements that systematically combine translation research with the "Production-Life-Ecology" concept. Therefore, it is necessary to further explore the English translation of Zhejiang maritime ICH under the

framework of the "Three Livelihoods of ICH" to make up for the deficiencies of the existing research.

2.2. The "Three Livelihoods of ICH" Translation Strategy

“Integration into the Three Livelihoods” is a new concept put forward by Zhejiang's ICH protection department at the 9th Zhejiang · China ICH Expo in 2017, namely "Integration into Production", "Integration into Life" and "Integration into Ecology". It means that ICH protection should be combined with life, production and ecology, forming a new model of systematic inheritance and protection in a "trinity" form (Ni Lingyan, 2022).

Focusing on the conceptual construction and practical path of the English translation of Zhejiang maritime ICH culture, this paper puts forward a core framework from the "Three Livelihoods" to "Globalization": conveying the real context of marine industries and fishing port-island scenes with "Integration into Production", presenting the living inheritance of folk skills in daily narration, emotional memory and community with "Integration into Life", and highlighting marine ecological ethics and the concept of blue civilization with "Integration into Ecology", making cultural communication a process of value interpretation and co-creation of communication. On this basis, the translation strategy emphasizes the coordination of "cultural meaning - discourse adaptation - cross-media presentation", takes into account both terminology standardization and story-based expression, and promotes the formation of understandable, empathetic and sustainable global communication and cultural identity of Zhejiang maritime ICH among international audiences.

Table 2. The Strategic Framework of "Integration into the Three Livelihoods

Integration Dimension	Core Orientation	Key Words	Key Projects	Implementation Strategy
Integration into Production	Means of Livelihood	Functionality	Traditional fishing skills in Zhoushan Fishing Ground, fishing rope knot weaving	Emphasize its practical value as a means of subsistence rather than a purely aesthetic object
Integration into Life	Way of Life	Contextualization	Fishermen's Work Songs, fishing village tourism customs, marine festivals	Show its emotional connection in daily life through context restoration
Integration into Ecology	Ecological Protection	Sustainability	The legend of Xu Fu's Eastern Voyage, marine biological worship	Highlight the symbiotic relationship between humans and nature, echoing the global sustainable development goals

2.3. The Uniqueness of Zhejiang Maritime ICH Culture

As a province with the longest coastline and the most islands in China, Zhejiang has a coastline of 2,200 kilometers and nurtures 87 marine ICH items such as Zhoushan Fishermen's Work Songs and Xiangshan Salt-making Skills, including 14 national-level ICH items. As a major province rich in maritime cultural resources,

Zhejiang's maritime ICH features a diverse range of types and concentrated distribution, covering fishing ballads, fishing customs, traditional marine skills and marine beliefs. With the continuous advancement of Zhejiang's strategy of "building a strong marine province" and the construction of a strong cultural province, the protection, development and international communication of maritime ICH have received increasing attention. Zhejiang's maritime ICH is closely related to regional history, marine production methods and people's lives, with distinct local characteristics and living features. Its formation is inseparable from the long-term marine production practice and religious culture of coastal people, making it an important spiritual carrier of Zhejiang maritime culture.

In terms of project types, Zhejiang maritime ICH mainly includes marine folk literature and music (e.g., Zhoushan Fishermen's Work Songs, Shengsi Fishing Ballads), marine folk customs and festivals (e.g., Ocean Thanking Festival, Ocean Sailing Festival), traditional marine skills (e.g., salt-making skills, traditional wooden boat building skills), and marine beliefs and legends (e.g., the legend of Guanyin, the legend of Xu Fu's Eastern Voyage). Among them, the Zhoushan Archipelago and the coastal areas of Ningbo are the most concentrated, with the number of relevant research and ICH list items ranking in the forefront of the province and even the country. Statistics show that the marine ICH items at or above the municipal level in Zhoushan have formed a relatively complete system, reflecting the fundamental position of marine culture in the local social structure (Jia Quanjv, 2013).

In the overall cultural pattern of Zhejiang, maritime ICH is not only an important part of local culture, but also an important symbol of Zhejiang's expansion from traditional agricultural culture to marine civilization. Academic circles generally believe that Zhejiang maritime ICH plays an irreplaceable role in shaping regional cultural identity, inheriting marine production experience and maintaining the relationship between humans and nature (Xu Junkang, 2017). At the same time, with the advancement of the strategies of "building a strong marine province" and "building a strong cultural province", the value of maritime ICH in cultural tourism, international communication and regional image construction has become increasingly prominent. However, most of the existing research focuses on the aspects of protection, development and cultural interpretation, with insufficient attention to its translation practice and cross-cultural communication issues, especially the lack of translation research from the perspective of the overall cultural ecology.

3. The "Three Livelihoods of ICH" Translation Strategy and the Cultural Inheritance of Zhejiang Maritime ICH

Zhejiang maritime ICH is deeply rooted in the production and living practices of coastal people, and its cultural inheritance is not dependent on textual records, but is continued through the labor methods, living customs and belief systems passed

down from generation to generation. Against this background, the traditional translation strategy targeting only language conversion is difficult to fully present the cultural connotations of Zhejiang maritime ICH. Starting from the three dimensions of production, life and ecology, the "Three Livelihoods of ICH" translation strategy provides a more holistic cultural inheritance path for the international communication of Zhejiang maritime ICH.

From the perspective of "Life", Zhejiang maritime ICH is highly close to daily life. For example, Shengsi Fishing Ballads and Zhoushan Fishermen's Work Songs are originally cultural expressions naturally created by fishermen in their daily labor and life communication. Taking Shengsi Fishing Ballads as an example, their lyrics are colloquial with direct emotions, reflecting fishermen's true feelings about family, livelihood and the marine environment. In the translation process, literal word-for-word translation of the lyrics is likely to weaken their life appeal. The "Three Livelihoods of ICH" translation strategy suggests that through situational reconstruction and emotional transmission, the translated text can still reflect its function as a life ballad in the target language culture, thus helping to continue and understand the life culture of Zhejiang maritime ICH.

From the perspective of "Production", Zhejiang maritime ICH is closely related to traditional fishery production. Zhoushan Fishermen's Work Songs play an important role in unifying rhythms and coordinating actions in labor links such as net pulling and oar rowing, being typical production-oriented ICH. Ignoring its labor function in translation and only regarding it as a musical or literary work is likely to lead to the deviation of cultural meaning. The translation strategy based on the "Three Livelihoods of ICH" emphasizes highlighting its production background in the translated text or annotations, enabling overseas audiences to recognize the practical value of this ICH form in the marine production system, thus realizing the "functional reproduction" in the sense of cultural inheritance.

From the perspective of "Ecology", Zhejiang maritime ICH contains rich marine ecological cognition. Taking the Ocean Thanking Festival as an example, this festival embodies fishermen's awe and gratitude to the ocean, reflecting the values of harmonious coexistence between humans and nature. In translation practice, strengthening the relationship between the marine environment, natural rhythms and religious behaviors helps to transmit the ecological wisdom carried by Zhejiang maritime ICH to international audiences and expand its cultural identity space.

4. The "Three Livelihoods of ICH" Translation Strategy and Ecological Protection

In the "Three Livelihoods of ICH" concept, the ecological dimension is not only an important foundation for the formation and inheritance of ICH, but also an increasingly important core issue in current ICH protection and communication. For Zhejiang maritime ICH, its cultural form itself originates from the long-term

interaction between humans and the marine environment, containing rich ecological cognition and survival wisdom. Therefore, introducing an ecological perspective into the translation process is of great significance for fully presenting its cultural value and avoiding decontextualized understanding.

From the perspective of eco-translation studies, translation is not an isolated language conversion act, but an adaptation and choice made by translators under the constraints of multiple factors such as language, culture and environment (Hu Gengshen, 2011). Zhejiang maritime ICH, such as Zhoushan Fishermen's Work Songs, Shengsi Fishing Ballads and the Ocean Thanking Festival, all take natural elements such as wind direction, tides and fishing seasons as important content. These natural images are not only narrative objects, but also important basis for fishermen to judge production timing and avoid risks. Treating them only as background descriptions in translation is likely to weaken their ecological significance. The "Three Livelihoods of ICH" emphasizes strengthening the interactive relationship between humans and nature in the translated text, enabling target language readers to understand the structural role of the marine environment in ICH culture.

Taking Shengsi Fishing Ballads as an example, a large number of natural phenomena such as wind, waves and ocean currents are involved in their lyrics, reflecting fishermen's high sensitivity and awe to the marine environment. In translation practice, retaining the narrative logic of wind direction changes and strengthening the active expression of natural elements helps to present fishermen's ecological concept of "living by the sea and working in accordance with the sea". This translation method not only conveys cultural content, but also indirectly disseminates the value concept of sustainable utilization of marine resources. In addition, some marine ICH festivals in Zhejiang, such as the Ocean Thanking Festival and the Ocean Sailing Festival, are essentially cultural responses to the marine ecological order. To a certain extent, such festivals play a social role in regulating fishing behaviors and adjusting the relationship between humans and the sea. In translation, revealing the ecological logic behind the festivals through supplementary explanations or contextual reconstruction helps international audiences understand the ecological wisdom in traditional Chinese society from a cultural perspective, rather than simply regarding them as folk performances.

In summary, the "Three Livelihoods of ICH" translation strategy integrates ecological protection awareness into translation practice, making Zhejiang maritime ICH no longer separated from its natural environment in cross-cultural communication, but presented as a whole cultural form of harmonious coexistence between humans and nature. This not only expands the research perspective of ICH translation, but also provides a new idea for the sustainable communication of ICH in the global context.

5. Case Study

5.1. Overview and Translation of Shengsi Fishing Ballads

Fishing ballads are folk music created by fishermen in their long-term production and life, whose origin is closely related to fishermen's labor practice and living environment. At that time, there were no mechanical tools, and fishing had to be done by human power. This forced fishermen to start and act in unison when working at sea to form a joint force and complete work that was difficult for one or a few people to finish, thus giving birth to fishermen's work songs (Gao Xufen, 2013).

Taking East, West, South and North Winds, a representative text of Shengsi Fishing Ballads, as an example, we can clearly observe the specific application path of the "Three Livelihoods of ICH" translation strategy in the English translation of Zhejiang maritime ICH. With the "east, west, south and north winds" as the core image, this text connects fishermen's collective memories of wind direction, sea conditions, production rhythms and survival experience. Its language is highly colloquial with a strong sense of rhythm, having the dual attributes of fishermen's work songs and fishing ballad chanting, and reflecting the distinct living, productive and ecological characteristics of Zhejiang maritime ICH.

From the "Life" perspective, the lyrics use a lot of fishermen's daily language and repetitive sentence patterns, such as direct descriptions of wind direction changes, labor scenes and emotional states, with strong oral traditional characteristics. Literal translation only is likely to cause meaning accumulation and aesthetic loss. Therefore, from the perspective of the "Three Livelihoods", translators should weaken word-for-word correspondence and adopt "contextual translation". By simplifying the repetitive structure and retaining the sense of rhythm and emotional color, target language readers can understand its function as a "life ballad" rather than just regarding it as textual material.

From the "Production" perspective, this fishing ballad essentially serves maritime labor, and its content is closely related to fishery production, collaboration rhythm and risk awareness. It is necessary to highlight the instrumental significance of fishing ballads in production practice in translation. For example, through annotations or supplementary explanations, explain its role in coordinating actions and boosting morale, thus avoiding its "de-functionalization" into a simple folk poem. This treatment helps overseas audiences understand that marine ICH is not a static cultural symbol, but a "living" production culture.

From the "Ecology" perspective, natural elements such as wind, waves and the sea frequently appear in the lyrics, reflecting fishermen's high dependence on and awe of the marine environment. In translation, we should consciously strengthen this interactive relationship between humans and nature, connect wind direction changes with survival risks and ecological experience, rather than simply treating them as natural descriptions, thus conveying the ecological wisdom contained in Zhejiang maritime culture.

Figure 1. Lyrics of East, West, South and North Winds



Table 3. Chinese-English Contrast Examples

Original Chinese (Excerpts)	English Translation	Reflection of the "Three Livelihoods" Dimensions
朝南风，雾露罩	When the south wind rises, mist spreads over the sea.	Ecology
二朝南风，雷雨暴	By the second watch, thunder breaks and rain lashes down.	Ecology
朝南风，脱棉袄	With the south wind warm, coats are cast aside.	Life
朝北风，起风暴	When the north wind comes, a storm is born at sea.	Ecology
二朝北风，移大锚	By the second tide, anchors must be moved.	Production
三朝北风，风暴连暴	After days of north wind, the storm shows no mercy.	Ecology + Production
朝西风，浪打浪	When the west wind blows, waves strike upon waves.	Ecology
二朝西风，网缠网	Nets twist against nets in the tide.	Production
恶浪滔天，命难逃	Life hangs between wave and rope.	Production + Ecology
朝东风，鱼满舱	When the east wind returns, the boat comes home heavy with fish.	Production Achievement
心花放	Hearts burst into joy.	Life
啊——（衬词）	Ah— (vocables retained)	Life
东西南北风	East, west, south and north winds—	Ecology
风风光光	the wind speaks, the sea answers.	Ecology

It can be seen that the translation of East, West, South and North Winds is not a simple semantic conversion, but a hierarchical presentation of the multiple cultural functions carried by the original text under the guidance of the "Three Livelihoods of ICH". At the ecological level, the translated text retains and strengthens the change logic of wind direction, climate and sea conditions, highlighting the dominant position of the marine environment in fishermen's life; at the production level, through expressions such as "anchors must be moved" and "nets twist against nets", it clearly reproduces the operability and risk of fishery labor; at the life level, it shows the function of fishing ballads as a daily life expression through the description of physical feelings and emotional reactions. This translation method

enables Zhejiang maritime ICH to be presented as a whole "living cultural practice" in English translation.

6. Conclusion and Prospect

Taking the "Three Livelihoods of ICH" concept as the theoretical framework, combined with the cultural characteristics and translation practice of Zhejiang maritime ICH, this paper systematically discusses its translation strategy in cross-cultural communication. Through the comparative analysis of the traditional ICH translation strategy and the "Three Livelihoods of ICH" translation strategy, and with the marine ICH text East, West, South and North Winds as a specific case, this paper demonstrates the necessity and feasibility of introducing the holistic perspective of "Production-Life-Ecology" into ICH translation. Traditional ICH translation mostly focuses on the descriptive transmission of cultural information, which is easy to solidify ICH into a static text and ignore its practical attribute as a "living culture". The "Three Livelihoods of ICH" translation strategy breaks through the limitation of single language conversion, emphasizing the internal connection between ICH and real life, production methods and ecological environment. In the English translation of Zhejiang maritime ICH, this strategy helps to reconstruct fishermen's life experience, labor logic and ecological cognition in the target language, enabling overseas audiences to not only "read" the content of ICH, but also "understand" its cultural generation mechanism.

Taking the translation practice of East, West, South and North Winds as an example, this paper finds that through contextual reconstruction, functional highlighting and ecological image strengthening, the translated text can realize the coordinated presentation of livingness, productivity and ecology while maintaining the core cultural images. This translation path not only enhances the cultural depth of the English translation of Zhejiang maritime ICH, but also improves its acceptability and communication power in the international context, reflecting the practical value of the "Three Livelihoods of ICH" translation strategy at the practical level.

Of course, this paper still has certain limitations. On the one hand, the number of cases is relatively limited, not covering all types of Zhejiang maritime ICH; on the other hand, the analysis of the acceptance effect of the translated text mainly stays at the theoretical level, lacking a systematic empirical investigation. Future research can further expand the research objects on this basis, and conduct a more in-depth verification of the communication effect of the "Three Livelihoods of ICH" translation strategy by combining methods such as audience surveys and corpus analysis. At the same time, this translation idea can also be extended to the translation practice of other regional or typed ICH to test its universality and adjustment space.

In general, the "Three Livelihoods of ICH" translation strategy provides a new path that takes into account both cultural inheritance and ecological awareness for the

international communication of Zhejiang maritime ICH, and also opens up a more holistic and reality-oriented research direction for contemporary ICH translation research.

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