

Construction of the Chinese-English Translation Corpus for Terms of Intangible Cultural Heritage: Taking Chinese Martial Arts as an Example

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Abstract: The Chinese-English translation of intangible cultural heritage (ICH) terms is crucial for China's cultural dissemination and international discursive power. However, current practices are plagued by inconsistent renderings, mechanical literalism, and loss of cultural connotations, primarily due to the absence of systematic terminology resources and standardized translation norms. Taking Chinese martial arts (Wushu) as a case study, this research proposes a corpus-based approach integrating quantitative and qualitative methods. Quantitative analyses of martial arts terms using Chinese and English corpora (COCA, COHA) reveal that these terms are highly culture-loaded, with technical terms comprising approximately 65% and theoretical terms carrying the most profound cultural meanings. Qualitative parallel text comparisons indicate that English-speaking countries favor domesticated translations such as "Kung fu," which tend to narrow the original concepts, whereas Chinese scholars prefer transliteration and literal translation—more faithful to the source culture but less internationally accepted. Based on these findings, the study proposes four corpus construction strategies (terminology classification, parallel text alignment, corpus-mining for strategy optimization, and multimodal platform expansion) and six translation recommendations: prioritize transliteration for term status; use literal translation for core information; supplement with free translation for cultural connotations; employ transliteration with annotation to balance foreignness and clarity; adopt cultural transplantation for lexical gaps; and implement a dynamic domestication-foreignization mechanism. This research aims to standardize ICH terminology translation and enhance the accurate international dissemination of China's ICH heritage.

Keywords: Intangible Cultural Heritage; Chinese Martial Arts; Terminology Translation; Corpus Construction; Chinese-English Translation

1. Introduction

Intangible cultural heritage exemplifies the diversity of humanity's exemplary traditional culture and embodies rich "local knowledge". Terminology serves as the core discursive instrument for representing, preserving, and cross-linguistically transmitting such knowledge. China currently holds the largest number of ICH items inscribed on UNESCO's lists (43 entries), fully demonstrating the cultural value and the breadth of the knowledge system embedded in Chinese civilization. Against the backdrop of the national strategy of cultural "Going Global" and the vision of building a

community with a shared future for mankind, the effective cross-lingual translation and dissemination of ICH knowledge have become integral components of China's cultural strategy. Nevertheless, due to the extensive scope and substantial volume of ICH translation practices, coupled with the diverse backgrounds and uneven competencies of translators, the lack of standardization in ICH terminology translation has become increasingly prominent, emerging as a critical issue that urgently needs to be addressed in the export of indigenous ICH terms.

The construction of a Chinese-English parallel corpus for ICH terminology offers a systematic solution to this practical demand. The development of corpus-based translation studies has provided new perspectives and methodological support for ICH translation research. Conducting ICH translation research based on corpora enables deeper exploration of the linguistic regularities and characteristics of ICH texts, facilitating the derivation of objective and broadly applicable principles and methods for ICH translation [1] (Jiang Liping, 2022). Nevertheless, studies integrating ICH translation with corpus construction remain scarce, and research building bilingual parallel corpora on locally sourced ICH materials is even rarer. Exploring translation methods and techniques for ICH terms on the basis of corpus construction holds significant theoretical value and practical importance for advancing the precise dissemination of ICH culture.

Chinese martial arts (Wushu), as one of China's most representative ICH items—Tai Chi was inscribed on the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in 2020—possess a terminological system that is extensive, highly diverse, and profoundly culture-loaded, making them a typical case for investigating ICH terminology translation. Chinese martial arts terms encompass not only the names and key descriptions of technical movements but also traditional Chinese philosophy, ethics, and aesthetic ideals. Their English translation faces multiple challenges, including cultural conceptual gaps, semantic asymmetry, and a lack of terminological standardization. Taking the English translation of Chinese martial arts terms as a case study, this research explores the construction of a Chinese-English translation corpus for ICH terminology, aiming to provide references for methodological innovation and the expansion of practical pathways in ICH translation research.

From the perspective of the nature and history of translation, the English translation of Chinese ICH terms is not merely a matter of linguistic conversion; rather, it constitutes a process of knowledge system construction and a practice of cross-civilizational dialogue. Behind these ICH terms lie the genes of Chinese culture and the wisdom rooted in folk life. In recent years, China's approach to translating ICH terms has gradually shifted from a passive state of being "shaped by others" to actively "shaping oneself." This shift plays a positive role in strengthening the country's cultural discursive power. From a national policy perspective, the English translation of ICH terms supports and facilitates the "going global" of Chinese culture. It aligns with the fundamental requirements of ICH preservation and international communication while providing foundational support for enhancing the country's cultural soft power. Overall, standardized English translations of ICH terms serve as an important instrument in building China's discourse system and effectively telling China's stories. They also contribute to better exchanges and mutual learning among different civilizations. At the academic level, this study adopts a corpus-based approach for empirical analysis, which compensates for the limitations of traditional research methods, advances the standardization of ICH translation, and promotes methodological innovation. As such, this research holds both academic value and practical significance.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Current State and Trends of ICH Terminology Translation Research

In recent years, domestic research on the translation of ICH terminology has shown rapid development, with increasingly diverse research perspectives. In terms of research themes, the focus has been primarily on the following directions.

First, investigation and problem analysis of the current state of English translation of ICH terminology. The research project English Translation of China's World-Class Intangible Cultural Heritage Terms and Standardization of Their Translations, led by Wei Xiangqing [2] under the China National Committee for Terminology in Science and Technology, systematically sorted out the terminological knowledge systems of ten representative world-class ICH items in China, including Guqin art, Kunqu Opera, Peking Opera, Yunjin brocade, and paper cutting, and conducted a comprehensive investigation into the English translation of core terms. The study found that the irregular phenomenon of "multiple translations for a single term" is widespread in ICH terminology translation, primarily due to translators lacking standardized translations approved by relevant professional institutions, as well as the absence of standardized resources such as bilingual or multilingual term bases for reference.

Second, research on standardized practical models for ICH terminology translation. Some scholars have approached the issue from the perspectives of translator subjectivity and standardized practice, exploring standardized pathways for ICH terminology translation. For instance, one study, drawing on the English translation of core terms in "Nanjing Yunjin Brocade Weaving Techniques," examined the essential characteristics and construction paths of standardized terminology translation in the international dissemination of ICH [3]. Another study, from the perspective of knowledge-based innovation, took paper cutting as an example to explore the clarification of core conceptual elements in ICH terminology translation.

Third, research on strategies and methods for ICH terminology translation. Zhao Xiangyun [4] from the perspective of semantic verification, explored the semantic correspondence between "Intangible Cultural Heritage" and the Chinese term "fei wu zhi wen hua yi chan", emphasizing that terminology translation is a complex systematic undertaking that should balance semantic equivalence with cultural functional equivalence. Studies on ICH terminology translation from the perspective of relevance theory further stress that translators bear the important mission of disseminating China's excellent traditional culture, and that the accuracy of terminology translation directly affects the effectiveness of communication [5].

It is worth noting that, up until the release of the fifth batch of the national ICH list, a literature search using "corpus" and "intangible cultural heritage" as subject terms yielded over 19,000 entries. However, research on building parallel corpora based on ICH texts has only gradually emerged in recent years. Taking Guangdong Province as an example [1], Jiang Liping comprehensively introduced the construction of a bilingual ICH corpus. Her study covers corpus composition, sources, annotation, and retrieval, and explores its application prospects in analyzing linguistic features of ICH translation, evaluating translation quality, and developing computer-aided translation teaching models. Zhao Lili and Song Xinyang established a small parallel corpus based on the Chinese and English versions of Intangible Cultural Heritage in China. Lv Jing and Li Yang constructed a small English-Chinese parallel corpus for folk culture in eastern Hebei. These studies have all developed small-scale corpora based on local ICH materials; however, their application value is relatively limited due to small sample sizes, a lack of classified database construction, and the absence of online

retrieval functions in most cases.

2.2 Core Issues in the English Translation of Martial Arts Terminology

Research on the translation of martial arts terminology started early and has yielded abundant findings, mainly focusing on the following aspects.

First, research on the characteristics and classification of martial arts terminology. As a specialized vocabulary in martial arts, martial arts terms serve multiple functions: summarizing martial arts content, describing technical styles, expressing movement essentials, and outlining action processes concisely. Researchers have classified martial arts terms from various perspectives. Among them, an influential classification system divides martial arts terms into five categories: technical terms, theoretical terms, technical-essential terms, and other terms. Martial arts theory carries distinctive Eastern cultural connotations, and its implied ideology, ethics, and modes of thinking embody the “Chinese mindset”, which poses fundamental challenges to the English translation of martial arts terminology.

Second, research on the current status and problem diagnosis of the English translation of martial arts terminology. Studies have generally pointed out that phenomena such as “multiple translations for a single term”[6], “mechanical and rigid translation”, and “mistranslation and misinterpretation” are common in the English translation of martial arts terms. The current English translation of martial arts is plagued by several key issues: inconsistent renderings of the same term, rigid mechanical translation, and arbitrary interpretation based solely on literal meaning. These problems have further led to the predicament of inadequate transmission of martial arts culture. Take “Tai Chi” as an example: this term has multiple English translations, which are not only disorganized but also contain obvious flaws in some cases [7]. An analysis of book titles in British and American libraries and paper titles in academic databases shows that explanatory translations have failed to achieve effective dissemination, while the communication effects of other translations remain highly unbalanced.

Third, research on the exploration of translation strategies and methods for martial arts terminology. In terms of translation strategies, the translation of martial arts terminology has undergone a transformative process: from domestication to foreignization, and finally to the integration of domestication and foreignization. Scholars have proposed various translation approaches, including “transliteration”, “literal translation”, “free translation”, “loan translation”, “transliteration + explanation”, “transliteration + free translation”, and “cultural transplantation” [8,9]. Some scholars advocate the adoption of the “Pinyin transliteration + English explanation” method for core martial arts terms. Regarding translation principles, relevant studies have established a three-dimensional criterion covering conveying “original meaning”, “retaining cultural essence”, and “realizing similar reader responses.” They have also summarized five basic principles, namely accuracy, conciseness, ethnic group, professionalism, and conventionality [10].

Fourth, corpus-based research on martial arts translation. Based on four large-scale corpora including COCA, COHA, the TIME Magazine Corpus, and The TV Corpus, Wang Lanyu analyzed the practical application of seven common English renderings of the term “wu shu” in English contexts [11]. The study found that the frequencies of “martial arts” and “kung fu” were significantly higher than those of the other translations. Nevertheless, these two expressions are not exact equivalents of traditional Chinese martial arts, revealing a one-sided understanding of this concept in the English-speaking world. This study provides a sound methodological reference for corpus-based

research on martial arts terminology translation.

2.3 Limitations of Existing Studies and Research Entry Points of This Study

A review of the above literature reveals the following deficiencies in current research. There is a lack of effective interdisciplinary integration between studies on ICH terminology translation and martial arts terminology translation. Although martial arts, as a typical ICH item, possess high research value, few studies have systematically explored its English translation from the perspective of ICH terminology construction. The application of corpus methods in ICH terminology translation research is still in its initial stage. Most existing studies rely on small self-built corpora with limited data volume, imperfect classification systems, and inadequate retrieval functions, which fail to support systematic research on standardized terminology translation. The methodological synthesis at the level of translation practice remains insufficiently systematic. Most available studies merely list various translation strategies, while few construct targeted terminology translation methods and skills based on corpus data mining and practical translation demands.

In response to these shortcomings, this study takes Chinese martial arts terminology as a case to explore approaches to constructing a Chinese-English translation corpus for ICH terminology. On this basis, it systematically summarizes translation methods and techniques for the English translation of ICH terminology, aiming to fill the gap between theory and practice.

3. Research Questions and Methods

3.1 Research Questions

This study aims to address the following three core research questions. First, what are the structural features and typological distribution of the Chinese martial arts terminology system? Which terms pose major challenges to the standardization of their English translations? Second, what similarities and differences exist between English texts from native English-speaking countries and translated works by Chinese scholars in the practice of translating martial arts terms into English? What implications do such differences hold for the construction of ICH terminology corpora? Third, what general principles and technical approaches should be adopted to build Chinese-English translation corpora for ICH terminology? In terms of translation methods and techniques, what systematic suggestions can be proposed to facilitate the standardized English translation of ICH terms?

3.2 Research Methods

This study adopts a combined research method integrating quantitative and qualitative analyses, as specified below.

This study systematically reviews academic literature concerning ICH terminology translation, English translation of martial arts terms, and corpus-based translation studies, clarifying the current research situation and development trends to lay a theoretical foundation for corpus construction.

This study collects a Chinese corpus of martial arts terminology and establishes a classified coding system to conduct frequency statistics and distribution analysis. Meanwhile, based on large-scale English corpora such as COCA and COHA, it explores the actual usage frequency, distribution features, and semantic evolution patterns of mainstream English translations of martial arts terms [11]. Drawing on the corpus construction methods proposed by Jiang Liping and other scholars, this paper explores the construction path of Chinese-English parallel corpora for ICH

terminology [1].

This study selects English materials on martial arts published in English-speaking countries and English translations compiled by Chinese scholars. A comparative analysis is carried out from the perspectives of terminology translation strategies, cultural transmission modes, and linguistic features to identify similarities and differences. The analytical framework covers preferences in term translation modes, interpretation methods of cultural concepts, and consistency of translated terms.

This study makes a systematic comparison between indigenous English expressions of martial arts and translated versions by Chinese scholars. Combined with cultural communication theories, it analyzes the advantages and disadvantages of different translation orientations in cross-cultural communication.

4. Research Findings and Analysis

4.1 Statistical and Classified Analysis of Chinese Martial Arts Terminology

After systematic collection and collation, this study gathered a total of 582 Chinese martial arts terms, which fall into five major categories: technical movements, technical essentials, theoretical concepts, weapons, and schools and boxing styles. The distribution of each category is presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Classification Statistics of Chinese Martial Arts Terminology.

Category	Number of Terms	Proportion	Typical Examples
Technical Movements	256	43.99%	Snap kick, Sweep kick, White Crane Spreads its Wings, Wild Horse Splits Its Mane
Technical Essentials	120	20.62%	Lower your shoulders, Sink the elbows, Keep your chest in, Lengthen your back, Sink qi down to Dantian
Theoretical Concepts	98	16.84%	Jin (force), Yi (mind), Qi, Yin and Yang, Xu Shi (emptiness and solidness), hardness and softness
Martial Arts Equipment	62	10.65%	Broadsword, Spear, Sword, Staff, Nine-section whip
Martial Arts Styles and Schools	46	7.90%	Tai Chi, Xingyiquan, Baguazhang, Shaolin Quan
Total	582	100%	

As shown in Table 1, technical movement terms account for the largest proportion (approximately 44%), followed by technical essential terms (about 21%) and theoretical concept terms (roughly 17%). This distribution indicates that the martial arts terminology system centers on practical techniques while containing profound theoretical connotations. Among all categories, theoretical concept terms carry the richest cultural implications. Concepts such as jin, yi, qi, and yin-yang have no direct equivalents in English, thus posing the greatest difficulty in translation.

Further analysis of semantic features reveals that martial arts terminology possesses several distinct characteristics.

Numerous technical movement terms adopt vivid descriptions by drawing on natural scenes and animal postures, such as “White Crane Spreads Its Wings”, “Wild Horse Splits Its Mane”, and

“Golden Rooster Stands on One Leg.” These terms not only accurately summarize movement forms but also embody aesthetic tastes and philosophical metaphors rooted in traditional Chinese culture. Martial arts terms form a rigorous hierarchical conceptual system. For instance, “Tai Chi” is a superordinate term covering many subordinate terms like “Grasping Bird’s Tail”, “Single Whip”, and “Cloud Hands”. These subordinate terms are intrinsically linked via core notions such as “jin”, “yi”, and “qi”. Such relevance demands systematic translation; each term should be translated within the whole conceptual network rather than in isolation. A large number of martial arts terms belong to unique Chinese cultural concepts without corresponding cultural cognition in Western countries. Concepts like “qi”, “yi”, and “jin” involve philosophy, human body theory, and combat skills, so simple literal translation cannot fully convey their in-depth meanings.

In terms of translation standardization, this study further selected 50 high-frequency core martial arts terms and counted their existing English versions in published translations. The statistics show that 41 out of the 50 terms have more than two different translations, accounting for 82%. For instance, the Chinese character “qi” has seven common English renderings: qi, chi, energy, vital energy, breath, air, and internal energy. The term “jin” has five translations: jin, strength, power, force, and internal power. Likewise, there are four mainstream English names for “tai ji quan”: taijiquan, tai chi chuan, tai chi, and shadow boxing. Such inconsistent and disordered translated terms are precisely the key problems that terminology corpus construction aims to solve.

4.2 Parallel Text Research: A Comparison of Martial Arts Terminology Translation by Native English Speakers and Chinese Scholars

4.2.1 Expressive Features of Martial Arts Terminology in English Texts from English-speaking Countries

This study selected three types of martial arts-related English materials published in English-speaking countries as research subjects: first, beginner-oriented textbooks on Tai Chi and martial arts such as *The Complete Idiot’s Guide to Tai Chi & QiGong*; second, relevant papers published in local English martial arts journals and magazines; third, martial arts terms used on English online platforms, including descriptions and comments under martial arts teaching videos on YouTube. Large-scale English corpora including COCA and COHA were also used for supplementary verification [11].

The research results reveal four major features of term usage in such English texts. First, there is a clear tendency towards domesticated translation, accompanied by a narrowing of cultural concepts. Texts from English-speaking countries generally prefer domestication strategies, translating martial arts terms into concepts familiar to English readers. For example, the Chinese word “qi” is often translated as “energy” or “vital energy,” “jin” as “power” or “strength,” and “tai ji quan” was often translated early on as “shadow boxing” or “Tai Chi.” Corpus data indicate that the usage frequencies of “martial arts” and “kung fu” are far higher than those of other translations, but these terms are not exact equivalents of Chinese “wu shu”, reflecting a one-sided understanding of the concept of Wushu in the English-speaking world. While such domesticated translation enhances the short-term acceptability of terms, in the long run it obscures the cultural specificity of martial arts terminology, leading to a loss of cultural connotation.

Second, Pinyin transliteration is increasingly applied, but without unified spelling standards. Along with the international spread of martial arts, Pinyin versions are widely used in local English texts. Taking “tai ji quan” as an example, the old expression “shadow boxing” is used only 258 times,

while “taijiquan” appears 2,082 times in corpus data. Relevant research conducted by Han Ziman on book titles in Western libraries and academic paper titles also confirms this trend [7]. Descriptive translated names have failed to gain widespread popularity; therefore, “taijiquan” is recommended as the standard English translation. Nevertheless, spelling confusion persists, with Wade-Giles spellings like “Tai Chi Chuan” and Chinese Pinyin spellings like “Taijiquan” frequently mixed together.

Third, simplification and generalization of terms are quite common. English-speaking writers tend to apply a limited number of general words to correspond to numerous professional Chinese martial arts terms. Words such as “technique,” “movement,” and “form” are widely used to translate various professional martial arts expressions. Such simplified expressions are easy for beginners to understand, but they sacrifice terminological accuracy and systematic completeness.

Fourth, explanatory translation is commonly used but has limited popularization effect. For terms with profound cultural meanings, local English texts usually add brief supplementary explanations upon first appearance. However, such explanatory translations have never achieved effective popularization, indicating that excessive reliance on explanatory translation cannot realize the standardization and universal acceptance of martial arts terminology [7].

4.2.2 Features of Chinese Scholars' Expressions in the English Translation of Martial Arts Terms

This study selects domestically published bilingual martial arts textbooks and English-translated works as research materials, including reference books such as Chinese-English Martial Arts Dictionary and Common English-Chinese & Chinese-English Martial Arts Vocabulary, as well as bilingual publicity readings like Chinese Martial Arts.

The translated works by Chinese scholars show the following characteristics. They prefer transliteration and literal translation to retain original cultural features. Compared with English writings by native speakers, Chinese scholars are more inclined to adopt transliteration such as “taijiquan” instead of “shadow boxing,” and literal translation like “White Crane Spreads Its Wings.” This approach aims to fully preserve the original cultural images and connotations, reflecting a stance of maintaining cultural independence.

Translated terms lack consistency, and multiple versions for a single term are prevalent. The same martial arts term often has different English renderings in works by different scholars or even in different writings by the same scholar. For example, “ba gua zhang” is sometimes translated as “eight-trigram palm” and sometimes as “baguazhang”; “xing yi quan” coexists in two translation forms: “form-and-will boxing” and “xingyiquan.” Such inconsistency greatly hinders the standardization and international communication of martial arts terminology.

Translation methods are relatively monotonous, with insufficient consideration of target readers' acceptance. Some translations overly stress cultural fidelity while ignoring English readers' comprehension, thus failing to achieve ideal communication effects. Although some literal translations faithfully present movement images, native readers cannot grasp practical technical essentials. Pure transliterations preserve cultural uniqueness yet lack contextual explanations, making it difficult for readers to form clear conceptual cognition.

Growing efforts have been made to standardize martial arts terminology through reference book compilation. Based on translation studies, linguistics, and modern lexicography theories, Li Hui explores standardized translation approaches for martial arts terms in *Research on the Compilation of Chinese-English Martial Arts Dictionary* via comparison, analysis, and empirical research. Reference books including Chinese-English Martial Arts Vocabulary collect more than 3,000 entries, laying a

solid foundation for the standardization of martial arts term translation [12].

4.3 Comparison of Differences Between the Two and Analysis of Their Causes

By comparing texts from English-speaking countries with those by Chinese scholars, the following differences can be summarized (see Table 2).

Table 2: Comparison of Terminology Translation Characteristics.

Dimension	Texts from English-speaking Countries	Texts by Chinese Scholars
Translation Orientation	domestication-dominated with proper foreignization	Foreignization-dominated with moderate domestication
Preferred Strategies	Free translation, explanatory translation, loan translation	Transliteration, literal translation, transliteration plus annotation
Terminology Consistency	Relatively consistent internally yet with narrowed cultural connotations	Poor internal consistency with widespread multiple translations for one term
Cultural Fidelity	Low, prone to loss of original cultural implications	High, focusing on retaining original cultural features
Reader Acceptance	High, easy for beginners to understand	Low, requiring relevant cultural background knowledge
Dissemination Effect	Wide influence but shallow understanding with generalized concepts	In-depth cultural delivery yet limited spreading scope

As can be seen from Table 2, significant differences exist between the two in terms of translation orientation, strategy preference, and dissemination effect. Such discrepancies stem from the distinct cultural standpoints and translation purposes of the translators. Translators from English-speaking countries aim to popularize martial arts among local readers, so they prefer expressions familiar to target audiences. By contrast, Chinese scholars intend to disseminate authentic martial arts culture and preserve its unique features, thus attaching greater importance to cultural fidelity. Both approaches have their own merits and demerits. The former enjoys wider popularity yet sacrifices cultural accuracy and systematic completeness; the latter maintains high cultural authenticity but encounters greater acceptance barriers in international communication.

From this, an important methodological insight can be drawn: the construction of a corpus for ICH term translation should not rely on a single orientation but should be inclusive, absorbing the strengths of both sides—the conciseness and effectiveness of English-language texts and the cultural fidelity of Chinese scholars' translations—and seeking a balance through comparative analysis.

5. Construction Ideas for a Chinese-English Translation Corpus of ICH Terminology

Based on the above research findings, this study proposes four core ideas for establishing a Chinese-English translation corpus of Chinese intangible cultural heritage terminology.

5.1 Corpus Establishment by Term Classification and Construction of a Conceptual Knowledge System

The primary task in building an ICH term corpus is to establish a scientific term classification system. For Chinese martial arts, the existing five-category framework should be further refined to form a hierarchical conceptual knowledge system.

Specifically, martial arts terms are divided into three levels: First-level categories (general categories) includes technical terms, theoretical terms, and equipment terms. Second-level categories (subtypes) includes technical movements, technical essentials, technical evaluation, philosophical concepts, ethical concepts, aesthetic concepts, weapons, and accessories. Third-level categories (specific entries) covers concrete terminology of all kinds.

Based on this classification, conceptual networks should also be built to link related terms. For example, “Taijiquan” as a superordinate term should be linked to its subordinate terms such as “Grasp the Bird’s Tail” and “White Crane Spreads Its Wings.” The core concept “jin” should be associated with its derived terms including “peng jin,” “lu jin,” “ji jin,” and “an jin.” This network-based knowledge organization helps translators maintain internal consistency within the entire terminology system in translation practice.

5.2 Bidirectional Alignment and Annotation Standards for the Parallel Corpus

An ICH term corpus should simultaneously contain a source language (Chinese) corpus, a target language (English) corpus, and a bilingual parallel corpus, enabling “source-target” bidirectional mapping of term translations.

Three principles should be followed in corpus collection. First, diversity: Chinese materials should cover official ICH documents, academic papers, inheritors’ oral records, and external publicity texts; English materials should include locally published works, academic journal articles, and widely used online expressions. Second, timeliness: texts published in the last ten years should be prioritized, while classic texts should also be included to allow for the observation of diachronic evolution patterns in term translation. Third, parallel correspondence: when conditions permit, bilingual (Chinese-English) publications should be prioritized to ensure the quality of parallel alignment. The approach of Zhao Lili and Song Xinyang, who built a parallel corpus based on China’s Intangible Cultural Heritage (bilingual edition), is worth emulating (Jiang Liping, 2022).

A multi-level annotation system needs to be formulated for corpus marking. Metadata annotation includes corpus source, text genre, publication date, and translator background. Terminology annotation includes original expressions, translated versions, term categories, and conceptual hierarchy. Translation strategy annotation includes transliteration, literal translation, free translation, explanatory translation [8, 9], and loan translation. Cultural information annotation includes degree of cultural load, type of cultural vacancy, and contextual explanation.

5.3 Optimal Selection Mechanism of Translation Strategies Based on Corpus Data Mining

The core value of corpus construction lies in providing empirical support for translation practice through data mining. Drawing on research methods that investigate the English translation of the concept “martial arts” through corpus analysis [11], this study proposes the following analytical approaches.

Term frequency analysis means by counting the usage frequencies of different English translations of a specific term in the corpus, one can determine which translations are more commonly used and better accepted in actual practice. High-frequency translations should be prioritized for recommendation. Collocation and contextual analysis means by analyzing the common

collocations and contextual distributions of a term, one can understand its semantic functions and pragmatic features in actual usage, helping to determine whether a translation accurately conveys the semantic meaning of the source term. Diachronic evolution analysis [7] means comparing translated expressions of the same term in documents from different periods reveals its evolutionary trends, offering historical references for formulating translation norms. Comparative analysis between Chinese and English texts means contrasting translation practices in native English writings and works by Chinese scholars helps summarize the advantages and defects of different translation tendencies and supplies empirical evidence for strategy selection.

On the basis of the above analyses, a “Translation Strategy Recommendation Matrix” can be established to offer targeted translation suggestions for different categories of ICH terms.

5.4 Multimodal and Multi-Platform Service Function Expansion

The ICH terminology corpus should not be limited to plain text but should be developed into a multimodal knowledge service platform to meet diverse user demands.

Multimodal presentation with pictures, texts, audio, and videos refers that for terms referring to martial arts technical movements, matched demonstration pictures and short videos can be attached to help users directly perceive actual postures; for theoretical concepts, charts can be adopted to illustrate logical relations between different notions.

An online search and sharing platform means that a web-accessible term search system should be developed, supporting Chinese-English bilingual search, category browsing, frequency-based sorting, and other functions, allowing translators to quickly query and reference terms in their translation practice. Meanwhile, experts in martial arts and translation should be invited to review term expressions to ensure professionalism and accuracy.

Open co-construction and dynamic updating mechanism refers that the corpus should function as an open and dynamically updated platform, encouraging scholars and frontline translators to supplement new terms and translations, and a peer review system should be established to sustain continuous improvement and quality control.

Connection with AI translation systems indicates that with the advancement of artificial intelligence translation technology, this corpus can serve as professional training data for AI models, thereby improving the accuracy and cultural adaptability of AI translation in ICH-related texts.

6. Suggestions on Methods and Techniques for the English Translation of ICH Terminology

Based on the above corpus construction ideas and comparative analysis results, this study puts forward systematic suggestions on the English translation of Chinese ICH terminology represented by martial arts terms, from the perspective of translation methods and techniques, aiming to conform to the current cultural communication orientation of introducing China to the world, spreading Chinese culture, and sharing Chinese wisdom globally.

6.1 Prioritizing Transliteration to Establish the Central Position of Terms

For core terms of Chinese intangible cultural heritage, especially culture-specific ones with no equivalents in English culture, Chinese Pinyin transliteration should be prioritized to establish the leading status of native Chinese terms in international communication. The evolutionary trend of the translation of “tai ji quan” shows that the Pinyin form “taijiquan” has a usage frequency of 2,082 times, far exceeding the free translation “shadow boxing” with only 258 occurrences, and has gained

wide recognition in academic research and practical cross-cultural communication [7]. Transliteration helps retain the inherent cultural identity of Chinese terms, prevents cultural misunderstanding caused by paraphrasing, and lays a solid foundation for terminology standardization and international popularization.

However, transliteration should not be used in isolation. As Han Ziman pointed out [7], “taijiquan should serve as the standard English translation for “tai ji quan”. This judgment is based on a systematic survey of book titles in British and American libraries and titles in academic paper databases. Therefore, for core martial arts names such as Taijiquan, Xingyiquan, and Baguazhang, Pinyin transliteration should be adopted as the standard translation.

6.2 Adopting Literal Translation to Convey Core Technical Information

For figurative martial arts movement terms, literal translation effectively presents physical gestures and retains artistic imagery. For example, “White Crane Spreads Its Wings” for “bai he liang chi” and “Part the Wild Horse’s Mane” for “ye ma fen zong” are appropriate translations [8]. Literal translation retains the imagery of the original Chinese terms while also helping English readers develop an intuitive understanding of the movement form.

In applying literal translation, two points should be noted. First, the English wording should conform to English grammar and usage conventions, avoiding stiff or unnatural “Chinglish.” Second, for expressions that are overly abstract or heavily loaded with cultural imagery, literal translation alone may not accurately convey the technical information; in such cases, the use of other translation strategies should be considered.

6.3 Using Free Translation to Elucidate Cultural Connotations

For theoretical terms with deep cultural connotations and complex conceptual systems, free translation can serve to elucidate cultural meanings and bridge cultural gaps. The core principle of free translation is to accurately convey the essential conceptual elements of the term, rather than providing a word-for-word correspondence.

Take “qi” as an example. Relying solely on the transliteration “qi” may not help English readers understand its rich connotations. Relying solely on the free translation “energy” would, in turn, lose its cultural specificity. Therefore, a reasonable approach is to use the form “qi (vital energy)” when the term first appears. This retains the central position of the transliterated term while using free translation to help readers establish an initial conceptual understanding. For the concept of “jin”, which carries both mechanical and cultural meanings, it can be translated as “jin (internal power/stored power).” This combined “transliteration + free translation” strategy has been validated as an effective approach in multiple studies on the translation of ICH terms [5,9].

6.4 Transliteration with Notes to Balance Concept Introduction and Interpretation

For the most complex and core cultural concepts, brief annotations should be added on the basis of transliteration. For example, “yin yang” can be translated as “yin and yang (the two opposing yet complementary principles in Chinese philosophy).” “yi” can be translated as “yi (mind-intent, the directing force of internal movement).” Annotations should be concise and to the point, helping readers establish conceptual understanding, while excessive length that might affect the fluency of the text should be avoided.

The “transliteration + explanation” method has been confirmed as an effective approach for

handling culturally loaded words in several studies [8,9]. This method retains the cultural specificity of the terms while providing readers with the necessary cognitive scaffolding, helping achieve a balance between cultural fidelity and communicative effectiveness.

6.5 Cultural Transplantation for Lexical Gaps

For terms that have no corresponding cultural references in English-speaking contexts, the cultural transplantation strategy is applicable, integrating such terms into the cognitive framework of target cultures and facilitating comprehension by means of analogy. For example, when translating the general concept of “wu shu”, both “martial arts” and “kung fu” appear far more frequently in English-language texts than other translations [11]. Although “martial arts” cannot fully convey the philosophical connotations and cultural implications of Chinese Wushu, it has become a widely accepted cultural borrowing within the current communication context.

Two points should be noted in applying the cultural transplantation strategy. First, it should not be overused, as overuse would cause Chinese ICH terms to lose their own cultural identity. Second, when using culturally borrowed translations, transliterations should be introduced at appropriate opportunities to gradually cultivate readers’ acceptance of transliterated terms.

6.6 A Dynamic Selection Mechanism Combining Domestication and Foreignization

In conclusion, the English translation of intangible cultural heritage terminology should not be confined to a fixed translation method. Instead, diverse translation strategies should be flexibly selected and combined in accordance with term categories, cultural load values, target readers, and communication contexts, so as to realize the organic integration of domestication and foreignization [13, 14].

Based on the findings of this study, the following category-specific translation method recommendations can be proposed (see Table 3).

Table 3: Demographic Variables of Participants.

Term Type	Recommended Translation Method	Example
Core concept terms (highly culture-specific)	Transliteration as primary, with brief annotation	qi→qi (vital energy)
Core martial art / school names	Transliteration as standard translation	tai ji quan→taijiquan
Technical action terms (clear imagery)	Literal translation as primary	bai he liang chi→White Crane Spreads Its Wings
Technical action terms (unclear imagery)	Free translation as primary	yun shou→Cloud Hands (free translation) or Yunshou (transliteration+annotation)
Technical essentials terms	Free translation as primary, transliteration as secondary	chen jian→sink the shoulders
Terms already widely adopted in English	Follow established conventions	gong fu→kung fu (although a more precise transliteration gongfu exists, kung fu is already conventionalized)

At the level of communication orientation, the current English translation of Chinese ICH terms should uphold the philosophy of “cultural confidence and exchange and mutual learning.” On the one hand, the national cultural identity of the terms must be preserved; on the other hand, attention must be paid to the effectiveness of international communication. The construction and application of bilingual translation corpora serve as scientific and systematic support for this goal. By accumulating high-quality bilingual terminology resources, we can gradually establish a standardized translation system with distinctive Chinese characteristics. In this way, Chinese intangible cultural heritage can spread across the world in a more accurate and effective manner, contributing Chinese wisdom to the exchange and integration of human civilizations.

7. Conclusion

This study takes Chinese martial arts terminology as a case to explore the construction of a Chinese-English translation corpus for intangible cultural heritage (ICH) terminology. Through quantitative and qualitative analyses, it reveals that martial arts terms are highly culture-loaded, with theoretical concepts posing the greatest translation difficulties. A comparison of English texts from native-speaking countries and translations by Chinese scholars shows that the former favor domestication strategies, which enhance acceptability but narrow cultural connotations, while the latter prioritize foreignization to preserve cultural authenticity, yet suffer from inconsistent renderings and limited international reach. Based on these findings, the study proposes a four-pronged corpus construction framework—terminology classification, parallel text alignment, corpus-mining for strategy optimization, and multimodal platform expansion—along with six translation recommendations. This research provides a systematic, data-driven approach to standardizing ICH terminology translation, advancing China’s cultural dissemination and international discursive power. Future efforts should focus on expanding corpus scale, developing online retrieval platforms, and integrating with AI translation systems to achieve broader and more accurate cross-cultural communication of China’s ICH heritage.

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