

# A Study on the Translation and Cross-Cultural Communication of Ancient Academy Culture in Jiangxi

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**Abstract:** *As a vital component of traditional Chinese culture, the ancient academy culture of Jiangxi embodies profound cultural connotations and unique educational philosophies, holding significant value for international communication. However, current translation and communication practices face challenges such as inconsistent rendering of culture-specific terms and limited communication channels, which hinder its global dissemination. This study proposes an optimized strategy of “stratified translation combined with multi-stakeholder collaborative communication”: adopting foreignization in academic contexts to preserve cultural distinctiveness, while employing domestication in public communication to enhance accessibility for general audiences. Furthermore, it recommends establishing a cooperative framework, leveraging social media and digital technologies to expand reach. The research demonstrates that systematic translation strategies and multidimensional communication models are crucial for promoting Jiangxi’s academy culture globally, fostering cross-cultural exchange, and providing both theoretical and practical insights for the international communication of other regional cultures in China.*

**Keywords:** Ancient Academy Culture of Jiangxi; Translation Strategies; Culture-Specific Terms; Stratified Translation; International Communication.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Jiangxi is the birthplace and a pivotal center of ancient academy culture in China, with its developmental history exemplifying the traditional Chinese education system. From the Tang Dynasty (618-907) to the Qing Dynasty (1636-1912), Jiangxi saw the establishment of 1,976 academies, accounting for 23.5% of the total in China (Li Caidong, 2022). Among them, the BaiLudong Academy (White Deer Grotto Academy 白鹿洞书院), founded during the Southern Tang Dynasty (937-975), gained renown through Zhu Xi’s White Deer Grotto Academy Regulations (白鹿洞书院揭示). These regulations not only expressed the educational principle of “Clarifying human relations and pursuing supreme goodness” (明人伦, 求至善) but also established a comprehensive pedagogical framework centered on the “Five Relationships as Framework, Sequential Learning Process, and self-cultivation as Foundation” (五教为纲、为学有序、修身为本).

In today’s era of globalization and digitalization, the international communication of Chinese academic culture faces three key challenges. First, the translation of culture-specific terms (e.g., “山长” [academy head] and “讲会” [scholarly lectures and debates]) lacks standardization, resulting in inconsistent renderings (Wang & Chen, 2021). Second, communication remains predominantly reliant on traditional print media, with digital channels accounting for only 17% of outreach activities (China Foreign Language Publishing Administration, 2019). Third, international audiences often exhibit a “museumization” tendency—perceiving academic culture as static historical relics rather than a living intellectual tradition (Zhang, 2022).

At present, China is vigorously advancing the Belt and Road Initiative, emphasizing not only economic collaboration but also cultural exchange and mutual understanding. Jiangxi’s ancient academy culture, a valuable part of traditional Chinese heritage, reflects educational principles, metaphysical ideas, architectural beauty, and other distinctive features that hold worldwide interest. Precise translation and effective global communication of this culture are crucial for presenting China’s cultural legacy and promoting cross-civilizational dialogue.

## 2. THE CONNOTATION AND CROSS-CULTURAL COMMUNICATION VALUE OF JIANGXI’S ANCIENT ACADEMY CULTURE

Jiangxi’s ancient academy culture represents a comprehensive system that encompassing educational institutions, philosophical thought, and material culture. Its rich cultural heritage holds unique value for cross-cultural

communication.

## 2.1 A Multidimensional Deconstruction of Cultural Essence

### 2.1.1 Educational Scheme

The ancient academies of Jiangxi developed a distinctive model of educational governance. The “Shan Zhang” (山长, academy head), as the central administrator, was responsible not only for overseeing teaching affairs but also for guiding academic discourse and managing daily operations. This role parallels that of a modern university president but places greater emphasis on scholarly authority and moral exemplarity. For instance, at the BaiLudong Academy (White Deer Grotto Academy), the academy head was required to possess profound Confucian knowledge and presided over curriculum design and scholarly debates. The “lecture-debate system” (讲会) transcended regional and scholarly boundaries, fostering intellectual exchange through regular academic discussions. A notable example is the “Gehu Debate” (鹅湖之会) at the Gehu Academy, where Zhu Xi and Lu Jiuyuan engaged in a heated discourse on “approaches to learning,” pioneering a tradition of open scholarly dialogue (Chen Lai, 2019: 112-115).

In contrast to Western university governance models, Chinese academy system placed greater emphasis on the educational philosophy of “Transformation through humanistic cultivation” (人文化成, Renwen Huacheng). While early Western institutions such as Harvard College emphasized academic autonomy, their governance tended to follow bureaucratic structures. Conversely, Jiangxi’s academies depended on the moral charisma and intellectual prestige of the academy head, embodying the Eastern philosophy of “Academy governance through moral exemplarity” (以德治院) (De Bary, 1991).

Likewise, the lecture-debate format was somewhat similar to the disputations held in medieval European universities; however, Chinese academies emphasized moral development and social improvement through intellectual dialogue, while European universities concentrated more on building systematic knowledge (Hall, 1976). This difference highlights underlying philosophical perspectives: the Confucian focus on ethical and social growth compared to the Western scholastic tradition's emphasis on the advancement of knowledge.

### 2.1.2 Philosophical Thoughts

Jiangxi, a pivotal birthplace of Neo-Confucianism during the Song dynasty (960-1279) and Ming dynasty (1368-1644), gave rise to two philosophical concepts of profound cross-cultural significance: Zhu Xi’s “investigation of things to extend knowledge” (格物致知, Gewu Zhizhi) and Lu Jiuyuan’s “the mind as moral principle” (心即理, Xin Ji Li). Zhu Xi’s epistemological approach advocated comprehending the heavenly principle (天理, Tian Li) through exhaustive inquiry into the nature of things. While this theory bears some resemblance to Western empiricism’s emphasis on acquiring knowledge through observation, it fundamentally differs by placing greater emphasis on the unity of moral ethics and cosmic order (Tu Weiming, 1991). Lu Jiuyuan’s doctrine of “the mind as moral principle” focused on inner enlightenment, showing certain parallels with phenomenology’s call to “return to the things themselves.” However, its ultimate goal of achieving the Confucian ideal of “inner sageliness and outer kingliness” (内圣外王, Neisheng Waiwang) stands in essential contrast to the individualistic tendencies of Western philosophy (Zhang Xianglong, 2015: 67).

In cross-cultural communication, translating philosophical concepts demands careful attention to cultural differences. For instance, Wing-tsit Chan’s translation of “Gewu Zhizhi” (格物致知) as “investigation of things to extend knowledge,” while preserving the literal meaning, requires supplementary explanatory notes to convey its moral dimension. This prevents Western audiences from interpreting it solely as a scientific cognitive activity.

### 2.1.3 Material Culture

The architecture of ancient academies embodies profound cultural symbolism. The Hall of Worshipping the Sage (礼圣殿) at White Deer Grotto Academy, serving as the central structure for Confucian rituals, reflects Confucian principles of “the Doctrine of the Mean” (中庸) and “ritual propriety” (礼制) through its symmetrical layout and upturned eaves supported by dougong brackets. The Pan Pond (泮池), inspired by the verse “Rejoicing in the Pan Waters” (思乐泮水) from the Book of Songs, symbolizes scholars’ pursuit of knowledge. Its semicircular design

subtly conveys the philosophical ideal of “Perfect yet not overflowing” (圓滿而不盈) (Liu Dunzhen, 2007).

Stone inscriptions such as Zhu Xi’s calligraphic masterpiece “忠孝廉节” (Zhongxiao Lianjie, Loyalty, Filial Piety, Integrity, and Moral Purity) serve not only as artistic expressions of brushwork but also as visual embodiments of Confucian values. Strategically placed in prominent locations within academies, these inscriptions cultivate a cultural environment of “不言之教” (Influence Others Without Preaching).

These material cultural elements hold unique communicative significance in international communication. The architectural aesthetics of the Hall of Worshipping the Sage (礼圣殿) can be contrasted with Western religious architecture, highlighting the East’s humanistic spirit of “敬天法祖” (Revere Heaven, emulate ancestors). The translation of stone inscriptions should incorporate artistic interpretation. For instance, “忠孝廉节” is rendered as “Loyalty, Filial Piety, Integrity, and Moral Purity”, with annotation explaining its origin as Zhu Xi’s calligraphic work—the vigorous brushstrokes visually embody the Confucian Junzi (gentleman) character (Ye Lang, 2020).

## **2.2 Unique Value in the International Communication**

As an important bearer of Chinese civilization, Jiangxi’s ancient academy culture holds unique significance in cross-cultural communication, reflected in its historical impact on East Asia and its capacity for dialogue with Western intellectual traditions.

### **2.2.1 Historical Influences in East Asia**

Jiangxi’s academy culture profoundly influenced East Asian educational systems. During the Southern Song Dynasty (1127-1279), the White Deer Grotto Academy Regulations spread eastward with Neo-Confucianism, becoming a foundational model for academies in Japan and Korea. Japan’s Shoheizaka Gakumonsho (昌平坂学问所) directly adopted these regulations as its charter, integrating the “五教之纲” (Five Relationships as Framework) with the Bushido spirit to create a localized pedagogical framework (Minamoto Ryōen, 2007). Similarly, Korea’s Dosan Seowon (陶山书院) emulated BaLudong Academy’s architecture and teaching systems while incorporating Sarim (士林派) scholarly traditions, achieving a creative transformation of Chinese academy culture.

This shared heritage facilitates “bridge-building strategies” in contemporary communication aimed at Japanese and Korean audiences. For example, it involves comparing the lecture-debate system (讲会) with Japan’s kaidoku (会読, group textual study) and Korea’s silhyehoe (시례회, ritual-literary gatherings). Translating core concepts such as “academy regulations” (学规) are translated using direct kanji/hanja equivalents (Japanese: 学規; Korean: 학규) to enhance accessibility (Wang Yong, 2018: 73).

### **2.2.2 Dialogic Potential with Western Sinology**

Parallels between Jiangxi’s academy culture and Western thought provide fertile ground for dialogue. The educational principle of “teaching according to aptitude” (因材施教) aligns with Aristotle’s view that “virtue is knowledge” in emphasizing personality cultivation; however, it diverges by prioritizing collective moral practice over individual rationality (De Bary, 1991). Architecturally, medieval European monasteries and Chinese academies both combined educational and residential functions, but monasteries centered on religious discipline, whereas academies focused on scholarly transmission.

Through nuanced translation, China’s academy culture can enrich Western Sinology. For instance, comparing the “学田” (Xue Tian: the economic foundation of academies) with European university endowment funds reveals shared sustainability models while highlighting China’s unique approach to “sustaining learning through cultural resources” (以文养学).

## **3. CURRENT PRACTICES AND CHALLENGES IN TRANSLATING THE ANCIENT ACADEMY CULTURE OF JIANGXI**

### **3.1 Types of Translation and Case Studies**

### 3.1.1 Classical Text Translation

The translation of classical texts forms the essential foundation for the international dissemination of Jiangxi's ancient academy culture, primarily encompassing three categories of materials: academy chronicles, pedagogical regulations, and annotated lecture records of eminent scholars. A paradigmatic case study arises in examining the differing translations of the term “学田” (Xue Tian) in the Bailudong Academy Chronicles. Some translators use the functionally transparent term “educational land” to emphasize its administrative role, while others prefer “scholar fields” to highlight its socioeconomic connection to the academic community (Wang Kefei, 2020). This hermeneutic divergence reflects distinct interpretive priorities: the former approach emphasizes a structural-functional perspective on academy operations, whereas the latter seeks to reconstruct the historical particularities of these land endowments as both economic foundations for academy sustainability and material support for scholarly pursuits.

Similar complexities arise in translating “讲会” (academic gathering institution) from the Gehu Academy Dialogues. Wing-tsit Chan's rendition as “scholarly debate assembly” appropriately emphasizes the discursive aspect by incorporating the term semantic reductionism by downplaying the institution's threefold functions as an integrated platform for didactic instruction, intellectual sociability, and philosophical dissemination. Such translational decisions inevitably influence cross-cultural understanding, either enabling a multidimensional appreciation or inadvertently narrowing the perception of these culturally embedded pedagogical institutions.

### 3.1.2 Translation for International Communication

The translation quality of scenic area guides, which serve as direct windows for cultural communication, profoundly influences international visitors' cultural experiences. For example, the translation of “释菜礼” (Shi Cai Li) illustrates this point. A literal rendering such as “Shi Cai Ritual” preserves the culturally specific term but lacks essential contextual information, potentially creating comprehension barriers for foreign tourists. In contrast, an interpretive translation like “Vegetable Offering Ceremony in Honor of Confucius” significantly reduces cognitive obstacles by conveying both the ritual's characteristics and its ceremonial purpose, thereby greatly enhancing visitor understanding.

Nevertheless, some scenic spots still suffer from problematic translations, such as rendering “山长” (academy head) simply as “mountain master.” This translation completely overlooks the term's dual significance as both an academic authority and an educational administrator, inevitably leading to cultural misinterpretations among international audiences.

### 3.1.3 Translation of Digital Communication

The rapid advancement of digital technology has introduced in new mediums for cultural communication, with VR tour narrations and short-video subtitles emerging as powerful tools for conveying Jiangxi's ancient academy culture. In the White Deer Grotto Academy's VR experience, the architectural landmark known as “礼圣殿” is translated as the “Hall of Ritual and Sage Worship” --a functional translation that reflects both the building's ceremonial purpose and its dedication to Confucian veneration. This interpretive approach, combined with immersive 3D visualizations, significantly enhances visitors' comprehension efficiency.

Meanwhile, short-video platforms favor more colloquial translation styles to engage younger audiences, as demonstrated by the dynamic rendering of “鹅湖之会” as “The Gehu Debate: China's Ancient Academic Showdown,” which creatively frames the historic philosophical encounter as an intellectual showdown.

However, digital translation encounters inherent challenges arising from temporal limitations and cultural simplification. The brief duration of short videos often necessitates the truncation of cultural annotations, resulting in problematic reductions such as translating “格物致知” (investigation of things to extend knowledge) as the overly simplistic “studying nature to gain knowledge.” This rendition strips away the concept's profound ethical dimensions and reduces a complex Neo-Confucian methodology to mere empirical observation.

## 3.2 Main Barriers to Cross-Cultural Communication

### 3.2.1 Cultural Schema Divergence: Conceptual Misinterpretation and Cognitive Bias

The conceptual distinction between China's "书院" (academy) and the Western notion of "academy" remains fundamentally significant. Although "academy" has been widely adopted as the standard translation, this rendering frequently leads Western audiences to equate these institutions either with Plato's Academy or with contemporary academic organizations, thereby overlooking the distinctive cultural characteristics of Chinese academies as multifunctional complexes that integrate education, ritual worship, and social interaction (Hall, 1976). This cognitive gap fosters misinterpretations: Sinologists may overemphasize their "exoticism" through an Orientalist lens, neglecting its contemporary relevance (Said, 1978). Just as international visitors commonly perceive these spaces merely as historical relics rather than as living cultural venues that continue to embody Confucian pedagogical traditions.

### 3.2.2 Terminological Anarchy: Cross-Cultural Adaptation of Philosophical Concepts

The translation of philosophical concepts often suffers from a lack of standardized terminology, leading to considerable confusion among international audiences. A case in point is the rendering of "知行合一" (Zhixin Heyi) from the ancient academies of Jiangxi, which currently exists in multiple competing versions: "Unity of knowledge and action" emphasizing holistic integration; "integrating knowing and doing" highlighting the dynamic process; "the identity of theory and practice" adopting modern philosophical discourse; and the concise "knowledge-action unity".

This terminological variation arises from several factors: the lack of authoritative translation guidelines; the divergent academic backgrounds of translators; and differing communicative purposes—whether targeting scholarly audiences or general readers. While this diversity reflects the richness of theoretical interpretations, it inevitably causes cognitive dissonance among non-specialist international readers, ultimately undermining the coherence and systematicity of cross-cultural communication.

### 3.2.3 Monolithic Channels: "Cultural Discount" in the Digital Age

The international communication of Jiangxi's ancient academy culture currently depends primarily on traditional channels, such as academic journals and translated classical texts, supplemented by occasional scholarly exchanges and cultural exhibitions. However, the underdevelopment of digital media platforms has led to significant "cultural discount" effects.

Current metrics reveal particularly low content penetration on global social platforms such as TikTok and YouTube, where academy-related videos attract only one-fifth the viewership of content featuring Chinese cuisine or martial arts (China Foreign Language Publishing Administration, 2019). This digital deficit presents a twofold challenge: first, it significantly limits engagement with younger demographics, as Generation Z shows markedly lower receptivity to textual classics while demonstrating a strong preference for short-form videos and interactive gaming formats; second, it hinders the effective multimodal transformation of cultural symbols—the spatial aesthetics of academy architecture and the dynamic rituals of ceremonial practices cannot be adequately conveyed through textual translation alone. The absence of digital formats such as VR-guided tours or virtual lecture forums further exacerbates the erosion of nuanced cultural meaning during cross-cultural transmission.

## 4. STRATEGY OPTIMIZATION FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF CROSS-CULTURAL COMMUNICATION

### 4.1 Stratified Translation Strategies for Content Communication

In cross-cultural communication, stratified translation strategies should be employed based on the characteristics of the audience communication objectives. For specialized audiences, such as sinologists and academic communities, foreignization strategies are essential to preserve cultural authenticity, supplemented by scholarly annotations and contextual explanations. A prime example is the translation of "鹅湖之会" as "The Gehu Assembly". The original phonetics through romanization while incorporating detailed annotations that describe it as "a pivotal philosophical debate held in 1175 CE between Neo-Confucian scholars Zhu Xi and Lu Jiuyuan, focusing on epistemological methodologies and metaphysical foundations" (Venuti, 2008). This methodology effectively maintains cultural distinctiveness while satisfying scholars' demands for academic precision.

When addressing general audiences, a hybrid approach that combines domestication with analogical interpretation



proves more effective. Rendering “鹤湖之会” as “Ancient Chinese Academic Symposium” employs the familiar Western concept of a symposium to enhance accessibility, supplemented by explanatory phrases such as “comparable to intellectual gatherings in Plato’s Academy” to facilitate immediate cultural connections (Nida, 2001). This dual strategy significantly reduces cognitive barriers while preserving the essential meaning.

For Generation Z audiences immersed in digital media, innovative trans-creation strategies that incorporate multimodal elements and symbolic reconstruction are essential. On platforms like TikTok, creative adaptations such as “Ancient China’s Great Minds Debate” for the historic Gehu meeting, enhanced with dynamic subtitles, animated graphics, and fast-paced editing techniques, effectively engage younger audiences. These approaches transform traditional cultural content into compelling digital experiences while preserving substantive value, demonstrating how classical scholarship can be revitalized for contemporary media environments.

## **4.2 Synergistic Mechanisms for Stakeholders and Channels**

### **4.2.1 Multi-Stakeholder Collaboration**

To effectively communicate academic culture, it is essential to create a collaborative ecosystem by combining resources from various stakeholders, including government agencies, universities, cultural organizations, and international platforms. This multi-party cooperation framework utilizes policy backing and resource coordination from government bodies, academic research and talent development from higher education institutions, content creation and experiential design from cultural entities, and channel expansion along with localized outreach through global partnerships.

A concrete example of this approach is seen in project-based initiatives like the “Jiangxi Academy Culture Global Communication Project,” led by the Department of Culture and Tourism of Jiangxi Province in partnership with Jiangxi Normal University, White Deer Grotto Academy, and Harvard’s Department of East Asian Languages and Civilizations. This joint effort fosters resource sharing and capitalizes on complementary expertise in translating classical texts, producing digital content, and organizing international traveling exhibitions.

### **4.2.2 Channel Innovation**

Channel innovation plays an equally vital role in this ecosystem. The first strategy involves visual storytelling through global social media platforms such as TikTok and Instagram, featuring bilingual interactive content with 3D-rendered representations of the academy’s architecture. For instance, the “Explore Bailudong Academy” series on TikTok combines VR panoramic tours with bilingual narration to comprehensively showcase the aesthetic qualities and cultural significance of key structures, such as the Hall of Ritual and Sage Worship and the Pan Pond, significantly enhancing visual appeal (China Foreign Language Publishing Administration, 2019).

Another essential approach involves establishing cross-cultural dialogue platforms through joint research centers with overseas sinology institutions, hosting regular international symposia, and organizing thematic exhibitions titled “Academy Culture and Eastern Wisdom” in the Belt and Road countries, complemented by live calligraphy demonstrations and tea ceremony experiences. Furthermore, the collaborative development of general education courses on academy culture with foreign universities, supported by multilingual teaching materials and resource kits, further extends the reach of these cultural initiatives.

## **4.3 Evaluation Framework of Communication Effectiveness**

The assessment of cross-cultural communication efficacy encompasses three interconnected dimensions. In the cognitive domain, analytical tools such as Google Trends and Baidu Index quantify shifts in global awareness by tracking search frequencies for key terms like “Jiangxi Ancient Academies” and “Bailudong Academy”, while structured surveys measure audience comprehension accuracy regarding essential concepts, such as the roles of the “academy head” (山长) and the mechanisms of the “lecture-debate system” (讲会) (Hall, 1976).

Simultaneously, the affective dimension utilizes social media sentiment analysis across platforms including TikTok and Facebook, examining engagement metrics including thumbs-up, shares, and comment patterns. Through NLP-driven evaluation, the frequency of emotionally resonant descriptors—such as “fascinating” and “insightful” in user feedback—measures the depth of cultural identification and emotional connection fostered by communication efforts (Lefevre, 1992).

Ultimately, behavioral impact is assessed using multiple indicators: monitoring year-over-year growth in international visitor attendance at physical heritage sites such as the White Deer Grotto Academy; analyzing traffic volumes for digital virtual tours; and tracking citation frequencies of academy culture studies in international academic publications. This approach effectively maps the diffusion of scholarly influence across global knowledge systems (Wang Kefei, 2020).

## 5. CONCLUSION

The international communication of Jiangxi's ancient academy culture is a complex endeavor that demands innovative synergy across translation strategies, communication mechanisms, and technological applications. The "stratified translation and multi-stakeholder collaboration" framework proposed in this study moves beyond the traditional binary opposition paradigm in translation research by emphasizing dynamic strategy adaptation to diverse audience profiles and establishing an integrated communication network through cross-sector partnerships. This model not only provides a practical approach for promoting Jiangxi's academy culture internationally but also offers transferable methodologies for disseminating other regional cultural heritages of China.

In this era of deepening global-digital convergence, the educational wisdom, philosophical insights, and humanistic spirit embodied in Jiangxi's ancient academy culture offer profound inspiration for addressing contemporary global challenges. By employing scientifically grounded translation methods and innovative communication channels, introducing this cultural legacy to the world represents not only the preservation and revitalization of China's cultural heritage, but also a vital practice in fostering civilizational dialogue and advancing the vision of a community with a shared future for humanity.

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