Research on International Adaptation Pathways for the Intangible Cultural Heritage Craft of Xiuyan Jade Carving

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Abstract: Xiuyan jade carving was included in the first batch of national-level intangible cultural heritage in 2006 and serves as an important carrier of Liaoning's cultural and tourism resources and Chinese jade culture. At present, the Xiuyan jade industry has shifted from "selling raw materials" to "selling culture, brands, and experiences." In 2024, its e-commerce sales exceeded RMB 8 billion, with products exported to more than 100 countries and regions worldwide. However, in entering international markets, Xiuyan jade carving faces challenges such as differences in cultural contexts, overly traditional product forms, inadequate quality standards and traceability, and shortages of cross-border sales channels and interdisciplinary talent. This paper proposes an integrated five-dimensional pathway encompassing "cultural translation, product reconstruction, internationalization of standards, channel localization, and contextual communication" to transform Xiuyan jade carving from a "local Chinese intangible cultural heritage" into an international cultural consumer product that can be understood, worn, collected, and communicated.

***Keywords*:** Xiuyan Jade Carving; Intangible Cultural Heritage; Internationalization; Cultural and Creative Transformation; International Dissemination of Jade Culture

1. Introduction

Against the backdrop of the Belt and Road Initiative, the global dissemination of Chinese culture, and the revitalization of county-level specialty industries, intangible cultural heritage is no longer confined to localized knowledge but must enter global markets through modern design, cross-border e-commerce, cultural heritage exhibitions, and cultural tourism experiences. As one of China's four renowned types of jade, Xiuyan jade has abundant reserves and diverse colors, providing an industrial foundation for expanding from collectible jade carvings into mass-market cultural and creative products, jewelry and accessories, interior ornaments, and city-themed gifts.

However, jade culture itself is deeply rooted in Chinese traditions. Expressions such as "a gentleman measures his virtue against jade," "lustrous and gentle," and "every carving embodies an intention, and every intention conveys an auspicious meaning" are not inherently intelligible to overseas consumers. Therefore, the internationalization of Xiuyan jade carving does not simply entail exporting traditional subject matter associated with Northeast China, the Manchu ethnic group, Hongshan culture, Buddhism, and archaic censers and vases in its original form. Rather, it requires cross-cultural adaptation while preserving core techniques such as plain-surface carving, the artistic use of natural color variations, and the tailoring of carving techniques to the characteristics of the material.

2. Internationalization Foundations and Practical Bottlenecks of Xiuyan Jade Carving

2.1 The Industrial Foundation for International Expansion Is Already in Place

Xiuyan has established a complete industrial chain encompassing mining, design, carving, quality inspection, e-commerce, and cultural tourism, with nearly 100,000 people engaged in the industry. Jade carving works have developed into seven major series comprising thousands of varieties, with products exported to more than 100 countries and regions across Asia, Europe, and the Americas. Xiuyan jade carving has appeared at events and venues such as the China (Shenzhen) International Cultural Industries Fair, the Osaka Expo, and the World Economic Forum in Davos. Works such as Ode to Life: One Family in the World have transcended the visual boundaries of traditional jade carving through the combination of "human dietary culture and groups of jade carvings," demonstrating Xiuyan jade carving's capacity for international exhibition and presentation.

2.2 Major Bottlenecks

First, the cultural discount is significant. Themes such as dragons and phoenixes, fortune, prosperity and longevity, Guan Yu, Maitreya, and Pixiu lack sufficient semantic context for overseas audiences. Although the Hongshan jade dragon, Manchu folk customs, and snowy landscapes of Northeast China are distinctive, they require reinterpretation.

Second, product forms are misaligned with overseas consumption scenarios. Consumers in Europe and the United States are more receptive to lightweight jewelry, minimalist pendants, fragrance accessories, and desktop ornaments. Chinese communities in Southeast Asia place greater emphasis on symbolism, gift-giving, and feng shui; however, the entire international market cannot be equated with the Chinese diaspora market.

Third, the quality assurance system lacks sufficient credibility. Overseas buyers are concerned about inferior products being passed off as superior ones, treated jade being misrepresented as natural jade, and certificates that cannot be verified. In recent years, Xiuyan has promoted clearly marked prices, quality inspection, and business integrity. Nevertheless, cross-border transactions still require blockchain-based traceability, bilingual Chinese-English certificates, and mutual recognition of third-party testing results.

Fourth, there is a shortage of interdisciplinary talent. Those who understand jade carving do not necessarily understand cross-cultural design; those who understand cross-border e-commerce do not necessarily understand the value of intangible cultural heritage; and those who understand curatorial practice do not necessarily understand the material properties of Xiuyan jade.

3. Core Logic: From "Craft Preservation" to "Craft Adaptation"

The prerequisite for the internationalization of Xiuyan jade carving is not to alter its intangible cultural heritage, but to divide it into three layers:

(1) Immutable layer: the modeling principles of plain-surface carving, tailoring carving techniques to the material, skillful use of natural color variations, hand-finishing and polishing, and the aesthetics of Northeast China jade carving;

(2) Translatable layer: transforming auspicious meanings into universal emotions (peace, growth, reunion, nature, and protection), translating Hongshan symbols into the language of "early human civilization," and interpreting Manchu patterns as the ecological aesthetics of northern ethnic groups;

(3) Reconstructable layer: wearing styles, packaging, dimensions, material combinations, price ranges, and sales channels.

The essence of international adaptation is to attract overseas users through "beauty" first, retain their interest through "stories" next, and ultimately encourage them to pay for "craftsmanship and culture."

4. Five Major Pathways for International Adaptation

4.1 Cultural Translation: Translating "Chinese Symbolic Meanings" into "Human Emotions"

A three-tier subject matter database can be established:

(1) Civilization tier: jade dragons, ritual vessels, jade bi discs, jade cong tubes, the Silk Road, rivers, the sun, and the moon, corresponding to "the common origins and order of humanity";

(2) Nature tier: snow, pine trees, deer, cranes, the moon, mountains, and water, corresponding to ecology, tranquility, and a slow-paced lifestyle;

(3) Emotion tier: protection, good fortune, love, birth, weddings, separation, and returning home, corresponding to life rituals.

For example, Tang Shuai's "Home in Northeast China" series carves pickled Chinese cabbage, sticky rice buns, and snow-covered trees from Xiuyan jade, evoking nostalgia for home among domestic audiences. For international audiences, these motifs can be reinterpreted in terms of "the ice and snow civilization of northern China" and "human concepts of protection from the cold and home." A Suzhou jade carver's creation of jade sachets in France, drawing a comparison between Chinese incense culture and the romanticism associated with Chanel, demonstrates that an "Oriental identity that invites comparison" is more effective than rigid literal translation.

4.2 Product Reconstruction: From a "Dominance of Decorative Objects" to Wearable, Spatial, and Gift-Oriented Products

The international market should be segmented into the following tiers:

(1) Entry-level: stud earrings, pendants, bookmarks, keychains, and cufflinks, priced at tens to hundreds of US dollars and positioned as "small objects with an Eastern aesthetic";

(2) Intermediate-level: combinations of jade with silver, wood, leather, and fragrance, creating contemporary jewelry;

(3) Collectible-level: master-crafted plain-surface carvings, reinterpretations of Hongshan culture, Silk Road panoramic compositions, and jade carving groups themed around humanity;

(4) Spatial-level: jade lamps, jade screens, jade murals, hotel furnishings, and exhibition pieces for embassies, consulates, and Confucius Institutes.

The integration of jade with titanium, Chinese lacquer, enamel, and diamonds in Hetian jade carving offers a useful reference. However, Xiuyan jade should capitalize on its greater color diversity, manageable dimensions, and cost advantages to create an accessible entry point into "Eastern jade aesthetics."

4.3 Standards and Traceability: Replacing "Mystique" with "Credibility"

Internationalization must address three questions: Is the product genuine natural Xiuyan jade? Has it undergone impregnation or dyeing? Is it worth the price?

The following measures are recommended:

(1) Bilingual Chinese-English testing certificates specifying lithology, color, whether the jade is natural, and any enhancement or treatment methods;

(2) A unique QR code for each item linked to blockchain-based traceability, covering the mining source, workshop, master carver, quality inspection, and exporter;

(3) An international version of the "Liaoning Quality Products/Xiuyan Jade Carving" standard, with a premium product line for Grade II or higher raw materials and works by provincial-level masters or above;

(4) Overseas after-sales services, including care instructions, repair guides, and buyback or exchange mechanisms, to reduce the risks associated with cross-cultural purchasing.

4.4 Channel Localization: A Three-Pronged Approach Integrating Exhibitions, Cross-Border Platforms, and Buyer Boutiques

(1) The high-end product line should target cultural heritage exhibitions, world expos, the World Economic Forum in Davos, intangible cultural heritage exhibitions, and jewelry biennales;

(2) The mass-market product line should leverage TikTok, YouTube Shorts, Instagram, Etsy, and Amazon Handmade, replacing hard-sell advertising with content showing "how jade is carved";

(3) The regional product line should target ASEAN countries, Japan and South Korea, the Middle East, and boutiques specializing in Sinology and Oriental art in Europe.

Research on cross-border e-commerce also indicates that rigid translation should be avoided and that process videos, artisan interviews, and cards explaining symbolic meanings should be used to enhance trust.

Under the RCEP framework, exports to ASEAN have grown relatively rapidly. Foshan and other cities have already undertaken a considerable share of exports of deeply processed Xiuyan jade products, demonstrating the feasibility of a collaborative model integrating "Xiuyan as the place of origin, hub cities, and overseas nodes."

4.5 Contextualized Communication: Integrating Jade Carving into Life Rituals and Urban Spaces

Overseas consumers may not necessarily purchase "Hongshan culture," but they may purchase:

(1) Birth gifts: jade rabbits, jade moons, and jade stars;

(2) Wedding gifts: paired jade clasps, jade rings, and jade knots;

(3) Graduation or travel gifts: jade mountains, jade boats, and jade eagles;

(4) Gifts for spatial settings: jade lamps, jade screens, and jade paperweights.

Embedding Xiuyan jade carving in narratives of "Eastern slow living, natural materials, time-honored craftsmanship, and shared human emotions" makes it more readily acceptable than simply emphasizing its status as a "national-level intangible cultural heritage."

5. Universities, and Platforms

(1) Government: Incorporate the internationalization of Xiuyan jade carving into Liaoning's cultural and tourism initiatives for international outreach, Northeast China's revitalization, and living transmission projects for intangible cultural heritage. Support participation in international cultural heritage exhibitions, applications for intellectual property protection overseas, and the establishment of overseas exhibition centers.

(2) Workshops: Master carvers should set benchmarks, while young designers should focus on mass production. Machine rough-shaping combined with manual detailing should be used to ensure consistency, avoiding the misconception

that “entirely handmade production makes scaling up impossible.”

(3) Universities: Liaoning University of Science and Technology, Anshan Normal University, and jade carving schools should jointly establish a specialization in the “International Communication of Jade Culture” to cultivate interdisciplinary talent who can produce designs, understand jade properties, explain its cultural significance in English, and navigate cross-border compliance requirements.

(4) Platforms: Douyin and Kuaishou should consolidate the domestic market, while TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube should be used for overseas content. Etsy and Amazon should facilitate transactions, and exhibitions should strengthen brand credibility.

(5) Cities: Shenyang and Dalian, as Liaoning’s gateways to the outside world, could establish “Xiuyan Jade International Experience Centers” to connect inbound tourism to Northeast China, visitors from Japan, South Korea, and Russia, the exhibition economy, and airport duty-free retail channels.

6. Risks and Boundaries

(1) Avoid excessive Westernization: Turning Xiuyan jade carving into “Chinese-style trinkets” would diminish the cultural depth of its intangible cultural heritage.

(2) Do not rely solely on Chinese communities: The Chinese market provides a fundamental customer base, but genuine internationalization requires reducing the barriers to understanding among non-Chinese-speaking consumers.

(3) Do not obscure enhancement and treatment methods: The international jewelry market places great importance on disclosure. Dyeing, impregnation, and artificial aging must be clearly indicated; otherwise, the reputation of the entire production region may be damaged.

(4) Avoid blind pursuit of the high-end market: Without the cash flow generated by mass-market cultural and creative products, the master-craftsperson economy will be difficult to sustain; without collectible-grade works, the brand will remain confined to a low-margin market segment.

7. Conclusion

The internationalization of the intangible cultural heritage craft of Xiuyan jade carving is not simply about “selling jade from Northeast China abroad,” but about repackaging Chinese jade ethics, the natural environment of Northeast China, Hongshan civilization, Manchu ecological culture, and contemporary Eastern design into a cultural language that can be consumed and appreciated worldwide. Its adaptation pathway should take core craftsmanship as its foundation, use human emotions as a medium of translation, adopt lightweight jewelry and spatial cultural and creative products as breakthrough areas, establish trust through traceability standards, and drive development through the dual engines of cross-border e-commerce and international exhibitions. Ultimately, Xiuyan jade carving should be elevated from a “renowned local intangible cultural heritage product” to a “global luxury handicraft and symbol of Eastern lifestyle aesthetics.” Future research could further investigate specific topics, including product category preferences for Xiuyan jade in RCEP markets, overseas consumers’ understanding of serpentine jade as a material, and the cross-cultural conversion rates of short-form jade carving videos. Only in this way can Xiuyan jade truly establish the identity of the “Jade Capital of China” not merely as a regional production brand, but as an Eastern landmark on the global handicraft map.

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