

# Exploring Cultural Transmission Issues in the English Translation of Philosophical Terms in Wang Yangming's "Instructions for Practical Living"

Yanhua Ma

Zhejiang Yuexiu University, Shaoxing, Zhejiang, China, 312000

## ABSTRACT

This paper explores the issue of cultural transmission in the English translation of philosophical terms in Wang Yangming's Instructions for Practical Living. By analyzing the challenges of cultural differences, contextual misinterpretation, cultural adaptation, and semantic distortion in the translation process, it highlights how these problems not only affect the accurate conveyance of the original philosophical ideas but also limit the target audience's understanding of their profound meaning. The article provides a detailed examination of the translator's dilemma in handling these philosophical terms, especially in balancing cultural adaptation with faithfulness to the original text to ensure semantic fidelity. Ultimately, it argues that translators must possess a dual perspective of both Chinese and Western philosophy and culture to achieve more effective cross-cultural communication.

## KEYWORDS

Wang Yangming; translation cultural transmission

Wang Yangming's Guide to Everyday Wisdom stands as a cornerstone text in Chinese philosophical discourse, embedding its foundational doctrines deeply within the Confucian intellectual tradition. Nevertheless, upon translating the work and its philosophical lexicon into English, cultural disparities and contextually skewed interpretations emerge as formidable barriers. Translation transcends mere linguistic transformation; it's a conduit for cultural transmission and exchange, intertwining narratives and values across diverse societies. The hurdle we face is ensuring that the profound philosophical undertones of the original work are safeguarded in English translation, thereby facilitating English-speaking audiences to grasp both its cultural nuances and the logical flow of its arguments.

## 1 Core Concepts and Cultural Connotations of Wang Yangming's Philosophical Thought

### 1.1 Overview of Core Philosophical Concepts in Wang Yangming's Instructions for Practical Living

Wang Yangming's Instructions for Practical Living is a concentrated embodiment of his philosophical ideas, revealing a unique philosophical system centered around the "School of the Mind" (xinxue). In this work, Wang Yangming's core philosophical concepts primarily include "the mind is principle" (xin ji li), "the unity of knowledge and action" (zhi xing he yi), and "the extension

of innate knowledge" (zhi liang zhi). These concepts form the foundation of Wang Yangming's School of the Mind, emphasizing the inner moral power of the mind and the importance of practice in moral cultivation. "The mind is principle" is the central proposition of Wang Yangming's philosophy, which asserts that the mind is both the origin of all things and the foundation of morality, and that all principles and moral laws originate from the human mind. This proposition seeks to break down the dualism between the objective and the subjective, emphasizing the infinite potential of the inner mind. "The unity of knowledge and action" is another crucial idea in Wang Yangming's thought, which holds that moral cognition and practice are inseparable, and that only through action can moral cognition be truly realized. Wang Yangming argues that knowledge and action are not independent parts but are complementary and mutually reinforcing aspects of an integrated whole. Through "the extension of innate knowledge," or discovering and maintaining inner moral consciousness, individuals can achieve moral self-perfection and fulfill their social responsibilities. These concepts reflect Wang Yangming's profound understanding of moral consciousness, self-cultivation, and practical philosophy, forming his distinctive philosophical system and providing new directions for the development of Confucianism in later generations.

## **1.2 Philosophical Connotations and Cultural Significance of "The Mind is Principle" and "The Unity of Knowledge and Action"**

"The mind is principle" (xin ji li) and "the unity of knowledge and action" (zhi xing he yi) are two core propositions of Wang Yangming's philosophy, representing his significant innovation and development of traditional Confucianism. "The mind is principle" serves as the starting point of Wang Yangming's philosophy, advocating that the human mind is the very law of the universe. Unlike traditional Confucian thought, Wang Yangming internalizes "principle" (li) into "mind" (xin), asserting that all moral principles and cosmic laws reside within the human mind. This proposition not only emphasizes the autonomy and creativity of the inner mind but also grants individuals a central role in moral cultivation and social conduct. "The unity of knowledge and action" further develops this thought, presenting the idea that knowledge and action are inseparable. Wang Yangming believes that knowledge leads to action, and action reflects knowledge; the two are interdependent and unified in the process of practice. This thought stresses that moral cultivation must be embodied in concrete actions and that only through practice can one truly reach a moral state. These two core propositions hold significant cultural importance, reflecting Wang Yangming's emphasis on the subjectivity and internal moral consciousness of individuals. They also resonate with the societal transformations of the Ming Dynasty, which brought new reflections on personal value and social responsibility, pushing Confucian thought from traditional moral dogma toward a more practical and individualized orientation.

## **1.3 Moral Ethics and the Concept of the Unity of Heaven and Humanity in Wang Yangming's Thought**

Wang Yangming's philosophical thought is deeply influenced by the Confucian tradition while also displaying distinctive innovation. His moral ethical views center around the "mind," advocating that the highest level of morality is achieved through inner self-cultivation. Wang Yangming posits that morality is not merely an external behavioral norm but an internal state of mind, a manifestation of an individual's "innate knowledge" (liang zhi). "Innate knowledge," as the moral source within the human mind, guides people's words and actions to align with moral standards. Wang Yangming emphasizes that through the process of "extending innate knowledge," each person can discover and maintain their moral consciousness and achieve moral self-perfection.

Building on this foundation, Wang Yangming further proposes the idea of "the unity of heaven and humanity" (tian ren he yi), suggesting that the human mind and the principles of the universe are one entity. Personal moral cultivation is not only related to individual happiness but also to the harmony of society and the cosmos. This concept of "the unity of heaven and humanity" emphasizes the intrinsic connections between humans and nature, and between individuals and society, advocating that inner moral cultivation leads to a harmonious unity between humans and both nature and society. This notion not only reflects Wang Yangming's inheritance and development of the Confucian tradition but also demonstrates his profound reflection on the relationships between morality and nature, and between individuals and society, offering a new perspective for the development of Chinese philosophy.

## **2 Challenges of Cultural Transmission in the Translation of Philosophical Terms**

### **2.1 The Impact of Sino-English Cultural Differences on the Translation of Philosophical Terms in Instructions for Practical Living**

The process of translating the philosophical terms in Instructions for Practical Living from Chinese to English presents significant challenges due to Sino-English cultural differences. These differences are not limited to the superficial structure of language but extend deeply into aspects such as ideological concepts, value orientations, and logical frameworks. First, traditional Chinese philosophy, particularly Confucianism, is characterized by a strong emphasis on ethics and practicality, focusing on the unity of internal moral cultivation and social behavior norms—an emphasis that has no direct counterpart in Western culture. For example, the term “心” (xin) in Wang Yangming’s philosophy is regarded as the source of universal reason and morality, but in English, it is often translated as "mind" or "heart." The former focuses on psychological and cognitive dimensions, while the latter is more associated with emotions. Neither translation fully conveys the ethical and cosmological connotations of “心.” Additionally, Wang Yangming’s concept of “知行合一” (zhi xing he yi) emphasizes the inseparability of moral cognition and practical action in the Chinese context. However, in Western philosophical tradition, knowledge and action are typically viewed as two distinct modes of existence, with the former belonging to the theoretical domain and the latter to the practical domain. Such distinctions can easily lead to misunderstandings in the translation process. Furthermore, the Chinese language itself is characterized by its implicitness and ambiguity, often using concise language to convey complex philosophical ideas, whereas English tends to favor precise and logically clear expressions. This stylistic difference poses significant challenges in translation. For instance, the term “良知” (liang zhi) encompasses multiple meanings, including moral consciousness, moral practice, and human nature, but in English, "conscience" or "moral awareness" cannot fully capture these connotations. These cultural differences force translators to strike a balance between preserving the depth and fidelity of the original text while ensuring that the translation is understandable and acceptable to the target audience.

### **2.2 Misinterpretation of Context Leading to Misreading of Wang Yangming’s Philosophical Thought**

Contextual misinterpretation often leads to a misreading of Wang Yangming's philosophical thought during the English translation of Instructions for Practical Living, resulting in deviations from the original meaning and a distortion of its philosophical content. This misunderstanding primarily stems from the significant differences between Chinese and Western philosophical traditions and cultural backgrounds, as well as from a disregard for specific cultural contexts. Wang

Yangming's thought is deeply rooted in the soil of traditional Chinese culture, and his philosophical terms have specific historical backgrounds and cultural connotations. However, in the translation process, if the translator lacks a profound understanding of traditional Chinese philosophy and its historical context, they may interpret these terms according to Western philosophical standards, leading to contextual misplacement. For instance, the expression "心外无物" (xin wai wu wu) in Wang Yangming's original meaning emphasizes the unity of the inner mind with the external world, advocating an understanding and grasp of the world through inner moral awakening. This reflects an inner moral cultivation and a sense of subjective consciousness. However, if translated as a form of idealism or extreme subjectivism in Western philosophy, the translation would overlook its deeper moral and ethical implications. Similarly, "知行合一" (zhi xing he yi) in Wang Yangming's philosophy emphasizes the inseparability of moral cognition and practical action, presenting a holistic view of the moral subject rather than a simple relationship between knowledge and action. However, in translation, it is often misunderstood as a general discussion in epistemology or action theory, neglecting its moral and ethical connotations. These contextual misunderstandings reflect the translator's lack of sensitivity and accuracy in dealing with cultural contexts and background knowledge when handling philosophical texts. Only by deeply understanding the cultural background, ideological roots, and contextual conditions of the original author can translators effectively avoid misunderstandings in translation and accurately convey the philosophical spirit and depth of the original text. Therefore, in the English translation of Wang Yangming's philosophy, translators need a solid foundation in both Chinese and Western philosophical knowledge and must maintain a high level of cultural sensitivity and contextual awareness throughout the translation process to ensure accuracy and completeness.

### 2.3 Manifestations of Cultural Displacement in the Translation of Philosophical Terms

Cultural displacement in the translation of philosophical terms in *Instructions for Practical Living* mainly manifests in the distortion of terms and the neglect of cultural connotations. This phenomenon reflects the differences between Chinese and Western cultures in terms of values, ways of thinking, and modes of expression. First, cultural displacement often appears as the Westernization of original terms. For example, Wang Yangming's "心即理" (xin ji li) emphasizes the universal rationality of the inner mind, presenting a unity of inner morality and cosmic order. However, in Western philosophy, similar concepts are often understood as expressions of rationalism or objectivism. This cultural displacement ignores the rich connotations of internality, subjectivity, and morality that "心" (xin) possesses in Chinese philosophy, simplifying it into a category of Western rationalism. Similarly, in translating "知行合一" (zhi xing he yi), cultural displacement is also apparent. In Western culture, knowledge and action are considered separate domains—knowledge is theoretical, and action is practical, with both having independence. However, Wang Yangming emphasizes the inseparability of knowledge and action, presenting a unity of moral cultivation and practical philosophy. This cultural displacement in thought leads the translation away from Wang Yangming's original intention, weakening its philosophical uniqueness and depth. Furthermore, cultural displacement is also reflected in the neglect of cultural background and historical context. For example, many of Wang Yangming's terms and thoughts are closely related to specific historical backgrounds in China, such as the social turmoil, political corruption, and intellectual confusion of the mid-Ming Dynasty. These background details are crucial to understanding his thought, but they are often overlooked in translation, resulting in a translated text that fails to convey the original's social and historical context, making it difficult for target readers to comprehend the deeper motives and intentions behind his philosophical views. Therefore, cultural displacement in the translation of philosophical terms not only affects the

accurate transmission of the original thought but also diminishes the depth and effectiveness of cultural exchange. To solve this problem, translators need to pay more attention to conveying cultural backgrounds in translation, deeply understanding the cultural context and historical background of the original text, and avoiding oversimplification that equates it with Western philosophical terms.

## **2.4 Challenges of Language Structure Differences and Complexity in Philosophical Expression**

Differences in language structure pose complex challenges to the translation of philosophical terms in *Instructions for Practical Living*, making it difficult for translators to handle the profound philosophical expressions in the original text. The Chinese language structure and mode of expression differ significantly from English, especially in describing abstract philosophical concepts and ideas, where these differences become particularly prominent. Chinese is renowned for its high degree of conciseness and rich connotations, often expressing complex philosophical thoughts and profound cultural meanings with simple words or phrases. In contrast, English tends to use more explicit and detailed sentence structures to describe similar concepts. For example, Wang Yangming's term "良知" (liang zhi) consists of only two characters in Chinese, yet its meaning is highly rich, encompassing moral consciousness, ethical judgment, and understanding of the cosmic origin. However, in English, similar concepts need to be conveyed through multiple words or a complex phrase, such as "innate moral knowledge" or "innate awareness of goodness." Although these translations capture part of the original meaning, they fail to fully convey the multiple philosophical layers and cultural connotations inherent in "良知." Moreover, the Chinese language often retains the openness and ambiguity of certain philosophical concepts through vague and implicit language, encouraging personalized interpretation and deep reflection by readers. In contrast, English, as a language that emphasizes logicity and clarity, often does not permit such ambiguity in its expressions. Translators must concretize or simplify the original text to meet the demand for clear expression, which can lead to misunderstandings or neglect of the original philosophical complexity. For example, the concept "心即理" (xin ji li) in Chinese possesses great philosophical flexibility and openness, capable of inspiring multiple interpretations and understandings. However, in English, it is usually translated as "the mind is principle" or "the mind is the universe's reason," which, while capturing some of the meaning, loses the openness and ambiguity of the original, limiting the reader's interpretative space. Therefore, the challenge of language structure differences in translating complex philosophical expressions requires translators not only to find a balance between the structural differences of the two languages but also to faithfully present the complexity and multiplicity of the original thought so that the target readers can fully understand and appreciate the profound connotations of Wang Yangming's philosophy.

## **3 The Dilemma of Cultural Adaptation and Semantic Distortion in Translation**

### **3.1 The Necessity of Cultural Adaptation in the Translation of Philosophical Terms in *Instructions for Practical Living***

Cultural adaptation is essential in the translation of philosophical terms from *Instructions for Practical Living* because it involves accurately conveying Wang Yangming's core ideas within different cultural contexts, ensuring they are understood and accepted by the target language's readers. Wang Yangming's philosophy is deeply rooted in Chinese cultural traditions, and many of its core concepts, such as "the mind is principle" (xin ji li), "the unity of knowledge and action" (zhi xing

he yi), and "the extension of innate knowledge" (zhi liang zhi), are imbued with unique Chinese philosophical meanings and contextual implications. These concepts are not only integral to Confucian culture but also reflect the distinctive Chinese way of thinking and worldview. Thus, when translating these terms into English, simple word substitutions are often insufficient to express their rich connotations. Cultural adaptation is needed to retain the original meaning and ensure effective transmission. This adaptation encompasses not only adjustments at the linguistic level but also considerations of the target culture's acceptability and modes of understanding. For example, the concept of "the mind is principle" in Chinese philosophy carries profound ethical and metaphysical meanings, involving both an individual's internal moral perception and the relationship between humans and the universe. However, in Western culture, philosophical traditions often regard "mind" as a psychological state or cognitive function, and "principle" is usually associated with logic and rationality. Therefore, the translation process requires adapting to these cultural background differences to help target readers grasp the full scope of the concept. The necessity for cultural adaptation is also evident in explaining and supplementing philosophical ideas, such as using annotations, interpretative translations, and contextual explanations to provide background information that the target audience might be unfamiliar with. Cultural adaptation helps avoid misunderstanding or misinterpretation of terms and enhances the readability and acceptance of the translation, thereby fostering deeper cultural and philosophical exchanges between the East and West. Thus, the necessity of cultural adaptation in the translation of philosophical terms from *Instructions for Practical Living* is both a requirement of language conversion and a crucial means of achieving cross-cultural communication and understanding.

### 3.2 Major Types of Semantic Distortion and the Loss of Philosophical Meaning

Semantic distortion is a common phenomenon in translating philosophical terms from *Instructions for Practical Living*. It refers to the loss or misinterpretation of certain terms' original philosophical meanings due to cultural differences and divergent modes of linguistic expression. Semantic distortion mainly occurs in several types. The first is simplification distortion, the most common type. Simplification distortion typically arises when translators simplify the original terms to make them more compatible with the grammatical structure or cultural understanding of the target language. For example, translating "良知" (liang zhi) as "conscience" falls into this category of distortion. In Western philosophy, "conscience" mainly refers to an individual's moral perception or sense of guilt, which does not encompass the broader moral understanding, moral practice, and cosmological perspective implied by "良知." The second type is cultural transplantation distortion, which occurs when translators attempt to adapt the original term to a similar concept in the target culture. However, due to differences in cultural backgrounds, this adaptation often fails to accurately reproduce the term's multiple meanings. For instance, translating "心即理" (xin ji li) as "the mind is the principle" might lead Western readers to misinterpret it as an advocacy of rationalism or epistemology, neglecting Wang Yangming's emphasis on moral subjectivity and inner mental strength. Lastly, equivalence distortion happens when translators seek to find corresponding terms in the target language for the original terms, but due to cultural background and philosophical tradition differences, such equivalent translations often fail to encompass all the philosophical connotations of the original terms. For example, translating "知行合一" (zhi xing he yi) as "unity of knowledge and action" may be understood as an expression of pragmatism or action philosophy, disregarding its unique significance as a principle of ethical and moral cultivation. These types of semantic distortions not only result in the loss of the original text's philosophical meaning but also may lead to misunderstandings of Wang Yangming's philosophy by the target audience. Therefore, understanding and overcoming these semantic distortions are crucial for accurately conveying the

philosophical thought in Instructions for Practical Living and achieving cross-cultural communication.

### 3.3 Cultural Adaptation and Semantic Distortion in Translating "Nothing Exists Outside the Mind" and "Innate Knowledge"

The conflict between cultural adaptation and semantic distortion is particularly evident in translating the core terms "心外无物" (xin wai wu wu) and "良知" (liang zhi) in Instructions for Practical Living. First, the term "心外无物" expresses a unique understanding of the relationship between the mind and the external world in Wang Yangming's philosophy, emphasizing the subjective initiative of the inner mind and the intrinsic unity of the world. In the Chinese context, "心外无物" not only suggests the transcendence of the mind over external things but also contains a moral philosophical stance that all things in the world can be comprehended and perceived within the mind. However, when this concept is translated into English, it is often rendered as "nothing exists outside the mind" or "there is nothing outside of the mind." Such translations can easily be misinterpreted by the target readers as a form of extreme idealism or subjective idealism, overlooking its multilayered significance as a moral and cosmological proposition. Hence, while this cultural adaptation may help simplify the superficial understanding of the translation, it inadvertently causes semantic distortion. Similarly, "良知" is another key term in Wang Yangming's philosophy, referring to innate moral consciousness and natural goodness. In Chinese, this term carries profound ethical and cosmological meanings, serving not only as the foundation for personal moral judgment but also as a bridge that connects humans with heaven and earth. However, English translations often use "conscience" or "innate knowledge," neither of which fully captures the rich philosophical implications of "良知." "Conscience" tends to point to the internal moral sense in Western ethics, while "innate knowledge" is more likely to be understood as a concept of innate epistemology, neglecting the practicality and moral self-awareness emphasized by Wang Yangming. Although this cultural adaptation helps the target readers establish an initial understanding of the terms, it unintentionally distorts the philosophical depth and cultural connotations of the original text. Therefore, balancing cultural adaptation with semantic fidelity to avoid the distortion of key philosophical concepts becomes a critical issue in translating Instructions for Practical Living.

### 3.4 Translation Strategies for Balancing Cultural Adaptation and Fidelity

In translating the philosophical terms of Instructions for Practical Living, finding a balance between cultural adaptation and semantic fidelity is a highly challenging task. The strategy to balance these two aspects requires considering how to maintain the philosophical depth and cultural connotations of the original text while ensuring that the translation is understandable and acceptable to the target audience. First, using annotations and interpretative translations is an effective strategy. Through annotations, translators can provide readers with more cultural background and contextual information without altering the core content of the original text, helping them better understand complex philosophical concepts. For example, when translating "心即理" (xin ji li), an annotation can be added to explain its specific meaning in Chinese philosophy and its distinctions from similar terms in Western philosophy. Second, flexibly using a combination of multiple translation methods is also an important strategy. For certain concepts, a combination of literal translation and paraphrasing can be employed to retain the literal meaning of the original terms while conveying their cultural and philosophical connotations through paraphrasing or supplementary explanations. For instance, translating "知行合一" (zhi xing he yi) as "the unity of knowledge and action," followed



by an explanation or annotation about its special significance as a principle of moral cultivation, can help achieve this balance. Third, translators should possess dual cultural backgrounds and philosophical literacy, enabling them to flexibly adjust strategies during the translation process to address the cultural and semantic challenges posed by different terms and concepts. Translators need not only to understand the core ideas of Wang Yangming's philosophy but also to be familiar with similar or related concepts in the target culture to make appropriate choices in translation. Moreover, using diverse expressions, such as metaphors and analogies, can help transform the complex ideas of the original text into expressions in the target language, thereby retaining the depth and richness of the original text as much as possible. Therefore, in translating *Instructions for Practical Living*, the strategy for balancing cultural adaptation and fidelity requires translators to use a variety of methods and techniques based on a deep understanding of both the original and target cultures, ensuring that the translation is both accurate and engaging.

### **3.5 Cultural Flexibility and Preservation of Philosophical Depth in Translation**

In translating *Instructions for Practical Living*, cultural flexibility and the preservation of philosophical depth are complementary and inseparable aspects. Cultural flexibility refers to the adjustments and modifications that translators must make to the cultural elements and expressions in the original text based on the cultural characteristics of the target language and the audience's comprehension capacity to ensure that the translation is effectively understood and accepted. However, the process of cultural flexibility also carries the inherent risk of how to maintain the philosophical depth and essence of the original text while making adaptations. Preserving philosophical depth means that translators should not only convey the superficial meaning of the original text but also ensure that the philosophical ideas and cultural connotations contained within the original text are fully presented. For example, the concept of "致良知" (zhi liang zhi) emphasizes Wang Yangming's focus on moral consciousness and practice. During cultural adaptation, translators need to ensure that its core meaning as a method of moral cultivation and philosophical belief is not lost. In practice, this balance between cultural flexibility and preservation of philosophical depth requires finding a way to adapt to the target language's culture while retaining as much of the original text's philosophical meaning and cultural depth as possible. This can be achieved by using rich linguistic expressions and supplementary explanations, such as adding detailed explanations of the philosophical background and cultural significance when translating "心即理" (xin ji li) to help readers understand the complexity and multiple layers of this concept. Meanwhile, translators should avoid over-simplifying or overly relying on similar concepts in the target culture, as this could lead to misunderstandings or biases regarding the original philosophical thought. Therefore, in translating *Instructions for Practical Living*, cultural flexibility and the preservation of philosophical depth are not mutually exclusive but should complement each other through carefully designed translation strategies, ensuring that the translation is culturally acceptable while retaining the essence and philosophical depth of the original text.

## **4 Strategies and Methods for Maintaining Semantic Fidelity in Translation**

### **4.1 The Application of Annotations and Interpretative Translation in Philosophical Terminology**

Annotations and interpretative translation are vital tools for maintaining semantic fidelity in translating the philosophical terminology of *Instructions for Practical Living*. These methods help translators accurately convey the deep thoughts of the original text while providing the necessary



cultural background and philosophical context to the readers, thereby avoiding misunderstandings and semantic deviations. Annotations are an effective way to supplement information, especially for terms that do not have direct equivalents in the target language and culture. For example, when translating Wang Yangming's term "心即理" (xin ji li) into English as "the mind is principle," readers may mistakenly perceive it as a simple cognitive proposition or rationalist viewpoint. To prevent such misunderstandings, the translator can provide annotations explaining this term's specific meaning in Chinese philosophy: "心" (xin) not only refers to individual subjective consciousness or rational function but also encompasses a universal principle and moral law. Additionally, "理" (li) in Wang Yangming's philosophy represents an intrinsic ethical law and natural order. Such explanations help the target audience understand the complexity of the term. Interpretative translation, on the other hand, involves adding brief explanatory phrases within the translation to directly aid readers in grasping the special meanings of the terms. For example, translating "知行合一" (zhi xing he yi) as "the unity of knowledge and action in moral practice" conveys the basic meaning of the original term while also highlighting its unique importance in moral practice. Annotations and interpretative translations effectively bridge the gaps between languages and cultures by providing more contextual information, enabling readers to grasp the original text's intellectual content more comprehensively. However, the challenge with this method lies in ensuring that the translation remains readable without excessively interrupting the flow of the text. Therefore, when using annotations and interpretative translation, translators need to strike a balance, providing enough explanation to convey the meaning of the original text while avoiding making the translation overly lengthy and complex.

## 4.2 Bilingual Comparison and Literal Translation Strategies: Pros and Cons Analysis

Bilingual comparison and literal translation strategies also play crucial roles in translating philosophical terminology in *Instructions for Practical Living*, each with unique advantages and limitations. Bilingual comparison involves a word-for-word juxtaposition between the original text and its translation, allowing readers to directly experience the original language style and philosophical expression. The advantage of this strategy lies in its ability to retain the maximum level of semantic fidelity, providing the target readers an opportunity to engage with the original text's authenticity. This is particularly useful when dealing with profound philosophical ideas and cultural connotations, as bilingual comparison can offer a multilayered understanding. For example, when translating "致良知" (zhi liang zhi), a bilingual comparison can present the original text and its translation side by side, offering readers the context of the original text and its corresponding explanation in the target language, thus helping them think within different cultural frameworks. However, the downside of this strategy is that it may increase the reading difficulty, especially for readers unfamiliar with the source language and culture, who might find this comparative mode cumbersome and time-consuming. Moreover, literal translation emphasizes the direct conversion of literal meaning, which is highly effective in certain situations, such as when the cultural connotations of the original term closely align with those in the target language. Literal translation can accurately convey the meaning of the original text. However, the primary issue with literal translation is that it may fail to adequately account for the differences in cultural and philosophical contexts. For instance, translating "心即理" (xin ji li) as "the mind is principle" does not fully convey the term's complex connotations in Chinese philosophy and may lead to misunderstandings. Therefore, while literal translation helps maintain semantic precision, it often needs to be supplemented with other methods, such as interpretative translation and annotations, to ensure that the target readers genuinely understand and appreciate the deeper meanings of the original text.

### 4.3 The Combination and Innovation of Multiple Translation Methods

Combining and innovating multiple translation methods is an effective strategy for achieving semantic fidelity and cultural adaptation when translating philosophical terminology in *Instructions for Practical Living*. Different translation methods have their advantages and suitable contexts, and flexibly combining these methods can better handle the complex challenges encountered during the translation process. For example, in handling the concept of “知行合一” (zhi xing he yi), a combination of literal translation and interpretative translation could be employed, translating it as “the unity of knowledge and action in moral practice,” while further explaining its importance and uniqueness in Wang Yangming's philosophy in the text or footnotes. Such a combined translation approach retains the term's original expression while providing the necessary cultural background information, enabling the target readers to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the original content. Additionally, when facing terms that are difficult to translate directly, such as “心即理” (xin ji li), the use of metaphorical translation can be employed, adopting metaphors or analogies more accessible to readers in the target culture to explain the original concept. For instance, the translator might render it as “the mind as the fundamental principle governing both moral order and cosmic harmony,” conveying the philosophical depth of “心即理” while using analogies familiar to the target culture to enhance understanding. Furthermore, innovative translation methods can utilize multimedia technology, such as adding interactive annotations or video explanations in digital publications, helping readers more intuitively grasp and appreciate the unique charm and depth of Wang Yangming's philosophy. By combining and innovating multiple translation methods, translators can more flexibly address the differences between languages and cultures, maintaining semantic fidelity to the greatest extent possible while achieving effective cross-cultural communication.

### 4.4 The Challenge of Semantic Fidelity from a Cross-Cultural Perspective

Maintaining semantic fidelity in cross-cultural translation presents unique challenges, especially when dealing with philosophical texts like *Instructions for Practical Living*. These challenges primarily arise from differences in cultural background, thinking patterns, and modes of expression. First, there are significant differences between Chinese and Western philosophy in terms of foundational concepts and forms of expression. Chinese philosophy, particularly Confucianism, often focuses on moral practice and ethical cultivation, emphasizing harmonious relationships between humans and nature, and between individuals and society. In contrast, Western philosophy tends to favor logical analysis and systematic theoretical construction. Therefore, when translating philosophical terms from *Instructions for Practical Living* into English, accurately conveying the unique cultural perspectives and intellectual connotations embodied in these terms becomes a primary challenge to semantic fidelity. For example, “心外无物” (xin wai wu wu) expresses Wang Yangming's unique perspective on the relationship between the inner mind and the external world. It is neither simple subjective idealism nor a rejection of materialism but rather a philosophical viewpoint that emphasizes internal moral consciousness and cosmic unity. However, when this concept is translated into English, it is often simply rendered as “nothing exists outside the mind,” a translation that overlooks its rich philosophical implications and cultural background. Furthermore, differences in language structure also pose challenges to semantic fidelity. The Chinese language is typically concise and implicit, with many philosophical concepts expressed in short phrases that convey complex ideas, whereas English tends to be more direct and explicit in its expression. Maintaining the ambiguity and complexity of the original text within this structural difference, while avoiding oversimplification or over-specification during translation, is another significant challenge. Therefore, maintaining semantic fidelity from a cross-cultural perspective requires translators to

have profound knowledge of both Chinese and Western philosophy and cultural sensitivity, enabling them to find a balance between different cultures and ensure that the translation conveys the original text's profound ideas and is accurately understood by the target readers.

## **5 Integration and Application of Philosophical Perspectives in Cross-Cultural Translation**

### **5.1 Differences and Similarities in Chinese and Western Philosophical Thinking**

Understanding the differences and similarities in Chinese and Western philosophical thinking is essential when discussing the cross-cultural translation of the philosophical terminology in Instructions for Practical Living. Chinese philosophy, particularly Confucianism, emphasizes holism, intuition, and practicality, focusing on harmonious relationships between humans and nature, as well as between individuals and society. It places a greater emphasis on ethical cultivation and the moral consciousness of the individual, seeking a state of inner and outer unity through internal moral awakening to achieve social harmony. For example, Wang Yangming's concept of "心即理" (xin ji li) reflects this holistic and internal thinking pattern; it emphasizes that the mind itself is the source of morality and the embodiment of cosmic order. This view underscores the importance of internal cultivation and moral practice in Chinese philosophy. In contrast, Western philosophy tends to be more analytical, logical, and rational, focusing on the dissection of knowledge and the construction of systematic theories, with a greater emphasis on objective explanations and understanding of the external world. In Western philosophical tradition, especially after the Enlightenment, reason is regarded as the primary tool for understanding the universe and society. This rational thinking emphasizes scientific methods, logical reasoning, and empirical research. Thus, Chinese and Western philosophies exhibit significant differences in their thinking styles and core values. When translating the philosophical terms in Instructions for Practical Living, the translator must be keenly aware of these differences, as these cultural backgrounds and philosophical thinking styles will directly influence the target audience's understanding of the original text. Understanding these differences is crucial for accurately conveying philosophical concepts in cross-cultural translation, as it helps the translator better grasp the gaps and commonalities between the two philosophical traditions, allowing them to find appropriate translation strategies that make the translated text faithful to the original meaning while being acceptable to the target culture.

### **5.2 How to Integrate Chinese and Western Philosophical Perspectives in Translation**

Integrating Chinese and Western philosophical perspectives is a critical method for ensuring that the translation of Instructions for Practical Living accurately conveys the original ideas and is comprehensible to the target readers. First, the translator should deeply understand the core ideas and cultural contexts of both philosophical perspectives. For instance, when dealing with "知行合一" (zhi xing he yi), the translator must recognize that this concept in Chinese philosophy encompasses both cognitive aspects and ethical practice requirements, whereas in Western philosophy, knowledge and action are often considered independent domains. Therefore, it should not merely be translated as "the unity of knowledge and action" but should include annotations or explanations that elaborate on its significance in Confucian thought regarding moral cultivation and practice. Second, the translator can use comparison and analogy, comparing Chinese philosophical concepts with similar ideas in Western philosophy to help readers understand better. For example, comparing "心即理" (xin ji li) with Immanuel Kant's concept of "rational autonomy" can be helpful.

Although there are differences in cultural and philosophical contexts, both discuss an internal moral law. Such an analogy helps the target audience establish a preliminary understanding framework. Additionally, translators can adopt a strategy of cross-cultural dialogue by directly incorporating viewpoints from both Chinese and Western philosophers into the translation to present a clash of ideas in a dialogical manner. For example, when translating “致良知” (zhi liang zhi), referring to Stoic ethics can help Western readers better understand Wang Yangming's ideas about moral introspection and self-cultivation. Through these methods, the translator can not only integrate Chinese and Western philosophical perspectives, enriching the depth and connotation of the translation but also enhance its cross-cultural adaptability, thereby fostering mutual understanding and exchange between Chinese and Western philosophies.

### 5.3 Comparative Analysis and Translation of “心即理” and the Western Concept of “Reason”

In translating the philosophical terminology of Instructions for Practical Living, “心即理” (xin ji li) presents a significant challenge as it involves fundamental differences between Chinese and Western philosophical perspectives. Wang Yangming's “心即理” advocates for the universality and moral nature of the inner mind, suggesting that the human mind is not only the cognitive subject but also the embodiment of the cosmic principle. This notion emphasizes an internal moral consciousness and a philosophical stance of unity between the inner self and the external world. In Western philosophy, however, “reason” is more commonly understood as a cognitive tool and logical faculty that serves as the rational basis for understanding the world and guiding behavior. For example, in Kant's philosophical system, reason is considered the foundation of moral law, but it still primarily functions in cognition and judgment. Therefore, when translating “心即理,” simply rendering it as “the mind is principle” or “the mind is reason” may lead Western readers to misunderstand it as a form of subjective idealism or rationalism, neglecting its dual function in Chinese philosophy of moral introspection and cosmic harmony. To convey this concept more accurately, translators can use interpretive translation and cultural analogy, translating “心即理” as “the mind embodies both moral principle and cosmic order,” while further explaining its multilayered meanings in annotations. This approach preserves the philosophical depth of the original term while avoiding the misunderstandings that might arise from a straightforward equivalent translation. Furthermore, by introducing similar discussions from Western philosophy, the translator can help readers better understand the uniqueness and universal significance of Wang Yangming's thought, thus achieving a cross-cultural philosophical dialogue.

### 5.4 Strategies for Reconciling Philosophical Perspective Conflicts in Translation

Philosophical perspective conflicts are inevitable when translating the philosophical terminology of Instructions for Practical Living, as Chinese and Western philosophical traditions differ significantly in values, methodologies, and modes of expression. The key to reconciling these conflicts lies in finding a translation approach that respects the original philosophical ideas while being acceptable to the target culture. First, the translator should adopt a strategy of cultural sensitivity, carefully considering the differences in cultural backgrounds and philosophical perspectives during the translation process. For instance, when translating “知行合一” (zhi xing he yi), the translator must recognize its significance in Chinese philosophy as an ethical practice concept rather than just a combination of theory and practice. This requires the translator to incorporate explanations of this conceptual background to avoid simplistic misinterpretations. Second, the translator can employ a strategy of philosophical dialogue by introducing related

discussions from Western philosophy to reconcile perspective conflicts. For example, when discussing "心即理" (xin ji li), comparing it with Kant's moral philosophy or Spinoza's cosmology can help the target readers establish a framework for understanding. Such dialogical approaches not only facilitate the exchange between Chinese and Western philosophies but also help the target readers grasp the profound connotations of the original text. Additionally, the translator can use interpretive translation and supplementary annotations to present the multilayered meanings of philosophical terms that are difficult to translate directly, ensuring both semantic fidelity and cultural adaptability of the translation. Therefore, the strategy for reconciling philosophical perspective conflicts in translation involves using multiple methods, such as cultural sensitivity, philosophical dialogue, and interpretive translation, to achieve faithful transmission and effective communication of the original ideas.

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## About the Author

Yanhua Ma, born in November 1981, female, Han, Shaoxing, Zhejiang Province, undergraduate, Associate professor; Research interests: English translation of Chinese literature, English teaching method.

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