

From the perspective of communication ethics, translators must actively manage cultural distance, ensuring smooth transmission of shenrong-related knowledge across cultural systems rather than relying on superficial label-matching. For audiences entirely unfamiliar with TCM, a “layered explanatory model” is particularly effective: Layer 1: Provide intuitive, relatable meanings (e.g., energy regulation, joint support). Layer 2: Add theoretical context (e.g., based on the Yin-Yang balance doctrine). Layer 3: Incorporate scientific evidence when appropriate (e.g., deer antler extract’s regulatory effects on cartilage cells). This creates an organic bridge across cultural, scientific, and market discourses (Yao et al., 2020; Han, 2025). The goal of communication ethics is not “accommodation for its own sake”, but rather the creation of a space in which culturally authentic concepts can be understood without triggering unnecessary resistance or misinterpretation.

6.3 Mechanisms for balancing cultural authenticity and communicative effectiveness

Responsibility ethics and communication ethics often exist in tension: the former prioritizes cultural depth and authenticity, while the latter emphasizes communicative clarity and accessibility. To achieve a dynamic balance in translating shenrong culture, a “text-type stratified translation strategy” can serve as a practical mechanism. This approach assigns different degrees of cultural visibility and conceptual explanation according to the text type: High visibility: Dense cultural and theoretical presentation in museum materials and academic texts. Moderate visibility: Interpretive adaptation in exhibitions and popular-science writing. Low visibility: Accessible functional expressions in advertisements and packaging (Zhang and Dong, 2020; Kadier et al., 2025). This “gradient of cultural visibility” acknowledges differences in audience capacity and informational needs, treating cultural content as a resource that can be contextually allocated rather than as an all-or-nothing choice.

In practice, maintaining this balance requires institutionalized, interdisciplinary, and multi-stakeholder collaboration. Translators, brand owners, museum institutions, industry associations, researchers, and regulatory bodies can jointly develop standards for terminology, translation style guides, and boundaries for efficacy claims in the international dissemination of shenrong culture, thus reducing cultural fragmentation and mitigating ethical risks stemming from inconsistent individual decisions (Han, 2025; Kadier et al., 2025). For instance, “traditional terminology explanation templates” could be developed to specify how terms like “tonify qi” or “benefit essence” should combine transliteration, interpretation, and annotation across text types. Scientific findings—such as the potential cartilage-regenerative functions of deer antler extracts (Yao et al., 2020)—may be introduced in consumer-facing texts with clear evidence-level indicators to prevent misinterpretation as confirmed medical efficacy (Ichim and De Boer, 2021). Through such balancing mechanisms, translation becomes not a passive struggle between authenticity and effectiveness but an active value-negotiation practice at the center of responsible cross-cultural communication.

7 Conclusion

7.1 Balancing cultural representation and cross-cultural adaptation in shenrong translation

The international dissemination of shenrong culture reflects the deep extension of the TCM knowledge system into global contexts. Its translation requires establishing a demonstrable dynamic balance between cultural representation and cross-cultural adaptation. On one hand, core TCM concepts carried by ginseng and deer antler—such as qi, Yin-Yang, essence and blood (jing-xue), and holistic regulation—lack direct equivalents in dominant Western epistemological frameworks. Overemphasizing biomedical reinterpretation from the target culture’s perspective risks compressing complex cultural–medical structures into a one-dimensional narrative of “functionalized, commodified” products. On the other hand, international communication requires translations to be intelligible, compliant with local regulations, and compatible with the target culture’s value orientations; otherwise, they cannot be integrated into existing health discourses or gain institutional and market-level legitimacy.

Thus, the core task of shenrong translation is not to choose rigidly between “fidelity” and “adaptation”, but to construct a reasoned equilibrium between cultural authenticity and communicative effectiveness. Practically, this balance relies on integrating explanatory expressions, contextual supplementation, and narrative restructuring. For example, while retaining terms such as “tonifying qi”, “benefiting essence”, and “harmonizing Yin and Yang”,