

From Artifact Decoding to Value Resonance: The Path of Cognitive Upgrading of Jiangnan Folk Crafts in Sino-foreign Humanities Exchange

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ABSTRACT

As an essential cultural repository of Chinese civilization, the folk crafts of the Jiangnan region embody the collective memory and spiritual identity of vernacular society. Rooted in the theoretical framework of cultural communication and supported by five years of practical exploration, this study systematically investigates the functional pathways through which Jiangnan handicraft study programs facilitate Chinese and foreign humanistic exchanges. The research findings reveal several key insights: first, the intricate cultural symbol system embedded within Jiangnan folk crafts transcends linguistic barriers, enabling a deeper level of emotional resonance across different cultural contexts. Second, craft-based course design that fosters direct collaboration between Chinese and Western students significantly enhances the efficiency of cross-cultural cognitive processes, allowing for a more profound mutual understanding. Third, the study introduces and validates a structured three-phase model—skills transmission, narrative reconstruction, and creative symbiosis—which serves as an effective mechanism for transitioning cultural values from the realm of passive external observation to active intersubjective engagement. More specifically, this model facilitates the transformation of cultural perspectives from the gaze of the other into a dynamic inter-subjective dialogue, thereby fostering a more reciprocal and participatory form of cultural exchange. Through this framework, the study not only provides a theoretical paradigm with substantial academic depth but also offers practical guidance for the international dissemination of Jiangnan culture. By demonstrating how traditional folk crafts can serve as a conduit for intercultural communication and mutual understanding, this research contributes valuable insights into the broader discourse on global cultural sustainability, heritage preservation, and cross-cultural education.

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1. Introduction

In an era where globalization is witnessing an increasing crisis of cultural identity, Jiangnan folk crafts, as a micro-narrative carrier of Chinese civilization, are undergoing a significant transformation—from *local knowledge* rooted in vernacular traditions to a *global public cultural asset* with international communicative potential. This shift

underscores the growing importance of traditional handicrafts as vehicles for cross-cultural understanding and heritage sustainability.

Grounded in the theoretical frameworks of *cultural semiotics* and the *contact hypothesis*, this study builds upon extensive research conducted over the past five years at the Jiangnan Craft Workshop of Suzhou University of Science and Technology, complemented by three years of international craft exchange activities at Suzhou Arts and Crafts Vocational and Technical College. Through longitudinal field tracking of various Jiangnan intangible cultural heritage projects—such as *Jiangnan glass mosaic painting*, *Peach Blossom Garden printmaking*, and *filigree enameling painting*—this research investigates how the pedagogy of traditional crafts can be strategically structured to foster meaningful cross-cultural dialogue. Specifically, this study explores how the methodological approach of *artifacts-techniques-narratives* facilitates the reinterpretation of Jiangnan handicrafts as a dynamic medium for cultural communication.

Findings suggest that Western academic perspectives on Jiangnan culture have long been shaped by an *orientalist gaze*, which tends to reduce the *aesthetics of the water town* to static and romanticized symbols, overlooking its inherent dynamism, evolving craftsmanship, and productive capacities. This cognitive bias, while limiting in traditional discourse, simultaneously presents an opportunity for innovative pedagogical intervention in craft education programs. By challenging these preconceptions, this study proposes a renewed theoretical lens for the design of craft-based study programs that emphasize cross-cultural engagement and active participation.

Methodologically, this research employs a *mixed-methods approach* to validate the effectiveness of the *cultural translation effectiveness model* developed by our research team. By systematically integrating qualitative ethnographic observations, participant interviews, and quantitative assessments of cross-cultural cognitive shifts, this model offers a comprehensive framework for assessing how craft education can serve as an effective bridge in Sino-foreign cultural exchanges. Ultimately, this study not only contributes to the discourse on heritage preservation and cultural sustainability but also provides a practical paradigm for reimagining Jiangnan folk crafts as a catalyst for global cultural dialogue.

2. The Value of Jiangnan Vernacular Folklore, the Emotional Connection of Craftsmanship, and the Cultural Translation Mechanism of Handicrafts

China's contemporary cultural development policies place significant emphasis on strengthening international communication capabilities, recognizing the necessity of constructing a compelling and authoritative Chinese discourse on the global stage. In an era characterized by economic globalization, cultural diversification, and the rapid advancement of social informatization, the dynamic relationship between China and the rest of the world is undergoing a historic transformation. As Xi Jinping (2020) aptly stated, "*Backwardness invites aggression, poverty invites marginalization, and cultural aphasia invites dismissal.*" While China has successfully addressed the historical challenges of economic vulnerability and geopolitical subjugation, the challenge of *cultural aphasia*—the inability to effectively project China's voice in global narratives—remains an urgent issue. Consequently, the construction of a distinct and compelling Chinese cultural discourse has become a crucial strategy for enhancing national soft power. Among the vast spectrum of China's cultural assets, the country's rich repository of traditional folk arts and crafts—particularly those originating from the Jiangnan

region—serves as an invaluable medium for fostering cross-cultural communication and advancing China's global cultural presence.

The Jiangnan region, often regarded as the birthplace of Wu culture, possesses an exceptionally rich reservoir of humanistic and artistic resources that have significantly contributed to China's cultural heritage. Since the late Qing Dynasty, travelers, scholars, and merchants from Europe and North America have depicted Jiangnan through diverse lenses, crafting a multidimensional and sometimes idealized representation of the region. Western accounts, particularly those shaped by early travelers, framed Jiangnan as a picturesque cultural landscape, brimming with aesthetic and poetic significance. Marco Polo (1999), for instance, famously extolled Hangzhou as "*the richest and most magnificent city in the world*," reinforcing a romanticized vision of the region. Throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, Jiangnan's architectural landmarks—including its **bridges, lakes, canals, bookshops, pagodas, and temples**—became focal points of Western observation, shaping perceptions of the region as a serene, almost mythical realm (Zhang, 2013). This constructed imagery contributed to China's broader cultural dissemination in the West, where Jiangnan came to symbolize an exoticized and poetic *cultural sanctuary* within the global imagination.

However, cultural narratives are not merely passive reflections of reality; they are active forces that shape international influence. Culture functions as a conduit for the exchange of information in human society, with communicative power determining influence and narrative control dictating ideological dominance. The ability of a nation to engage effectively in cultural discourse and international storytelling is a crucial metric of its comprehensive strength and global standing (Zheng & Wang, 2021). In this context, the strategic imperative of "*telling China's story well*" has emerged as a central theme in Sino-foreign cultural exchanges. This approach aligns with the "*smart strategy*" communication model, which is based on Xi Jinping's broader geopolitical vision of "*building a community with a shared future for mankind*."

As Joseph Nye (2005) theorized, **success in modern international competition is no longer solely dictated by military strength or economic power but by the persuasiveness of a nation's cultural narrative—essentially, whose story resonates most.** This underscores the importance of crafting compelling and authentic cultural narratives that bridge traditional, modern, and global perspectives. Within this framework, China's cultural storytelling must strategically interweave three essential narrative forms:

1. Traditional Chinese cultural narratives, rooted in historical heritage and classical artistic expressions.
2. Modern Chinese cultural narratives, reflecting contemporary transformations, technological advancements, and societal progress.
3. Global Chinese cultural narratives, integrating Chinese culture within transnational dialogues, fostering cross-cultural appreciation and mutual learning.

By constructing and promoting these narratives, China can further assert its cultural wisdom and contribute to the global intellectual and artistic landscape. Moreover, this approach offers an opportunity to reposition Jiangnan folk crafts beyond their historical significance and into a contemporary, globally relevant context, allowing them to function as both cultural artifacts and dynamic tools of intercultural dialogue.

Traditional handicrafts serve as a unique form of cultural translation, bridging linguistic and ideological gaps through material culture, embodied practice, and sensory

experience. As a super-symbolic aggregate, Jiangnan folk crafts encapsulate multilayered cultural meanings in their motifs, materials, and technical processes, allowing them to function as a powerful medium for cross-cultural interpretation. Through carefully curated study programs and interactive craft-based exchanges, these artisanal traditions offer a participatory model of cultural communication, shifting the role of the learner from a passive observer to an active cultural participant.

By integrating Jiangnan folk crafts into structured and intentional cross-cultural educational frameworks, this study aims to advance China's international cultural narrative, demonstrating how traditional craftsmanship can be leveraged not only for heritage preservation but also for global discourse construction and cultural diplomacy. This process of cultural translation—transforming local artistic traditions into globally resonant forms of creative expression—holds significant implications for China's evolving cultural strategy in the 21st century.

It can be viewed as a symbol that links the Jiangnan region's cultural identity with global recognition. The intricate stitching and vibrant colors found in Suzhou embroidery not only reflect the aesthetic values and technical mastery of local artisans but also serve as a bridge between the traditional Chinese craftsmanship and contemporary global art forms. In this context, the embroidery's patterns—ranging from nature-inspired designs to depictions of historical and mythical stories—become "indicators" that signify specific cultural meanings rooted in Jiangnan's history and ethos.

However, when these symbols are viewed through the lens of cross-cultural communication, they often undergo a transformation. For instance, a Suzhou embroidered image of a dragon, traditionally a symbol of power and auspiciousness in Chinese culture, may take on different interpretations or emotional resonances when viewed in a Western context, where the dragon may symbolize mysticism or even fantasy. This shift in meaning is part of the broader process of cultural translation that transcends borders, revealing the dynamic interaction between local traditions and global audiences.

Furthermore, as these handcrafted goods become part of a globalized market, their role as "super-symbolic aggregates" is expanded. Their value is no longer confined to their local cultural significance but also includes their capacity to adapt and convey messages in new contexts. In this sense, Jiangnan folk crafts can be considered as evolving media that facilitate the transmission of cultural knowledge while also incorporating global perspectives into their meanings. This transformation underscores the growing importance of studying these crafts not just as regional artifacts, but as global symbols capable of fostering deeper intercultural understanding.

As such, the study of Jiangnan's handicrafts, particularly in academic and cultural exchange programs, offers a rich avenue for exploring how local cultural expressions can function within the broader framework of global cultural dialogue. By embracing the semiotic complexity and adaptability of these crafts, scholars and cultural practitioners can further enrich the ongoing process of cultural exchange and mutual respect between China and the world.



Figure1. Carp image in Suzhou embroidery, taken at the Embroidery Street, Zhenhu Town, High-Tech Zone, Suzhou City, Jiangsu Province, China (as the work is a mass commodity property rather than a work of art, its image is widely used in all kinds of artworks)

This multi-layered interpretative framework not only underscores the inherent complexity embedded in the semiotics of Jiangnan handicrafts but also illuminates the intricate challenges that emerge within the realm of cross-cultural dialogue. The empirical evidence derived from extensive field data, as reported by the Suzhou Embroidery Research Institute in their 2022 survey, indicates that while technical attributes—such as the density of silk threads and the material quality—tend to be relatively straightforward to decode and appreciate across various cultural contexts, the symbolic dimensions that are woven into metaphors such as “Fish Leaping Dragon Gate (Fig. 1)” or embodied in the full-bodied form of the Huishan clay figure ‘Daafu’ demand a far more nuanced and contextually rich interpretative approach. This disparity between the ease of interpreting physical attributes and the complexity of cultural metaphors highlights the critical need for interdisciplinary methodologies that integrate insights from art history, cultural studies, and hands-on craftsmanship into a comprehensive framework for humanistic communication studies.

Moreover, this layered structure of interpretation supports the notion that handicrafts function as a ‘detachable cultural text’, wherein each level of symbol—whether resembling, indicative, or metaphorical—carries its own set of interpretative challenges and communicative potentials. Consequently, to effectively bridge the gap in cross-cultural understanding, it becomes imperative to develop immersive cultural exchange programs and targeted educational initiatives that not only elucidate the technical precision underlying these traditional crafts but also foster a deeper appreciation for the symbolic narratives they encapsulate. By engaging scholars, artisans, and cultural practitioners in a collaborative dialogue, the rich heritage and dynamic cultural expressions of the Jiangnan region can be more accurately transmitted and globally contextualized, ensuring that both the tangible and intangible aspects of this legacy continue to inspire, inform, and enrich intercultural communication.

In summary, the synthesis of empirical research and theoretical insights offers robust support for the integration of Jiangnan folk crafts into broader humanistic communication studies. This integration not only contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of the local cultural heritage but also enhances global dialogue by

bridging the interpretative divide between the physical and symbolic dimensions of traditional art forms.

3. Embodied Practice and Cognitive Reconstruction: The Cross-Cultural Differential Patterns of Study Programmes

As a form of embodied cultural practice, the core value of handicraft study lies in breaking the boundaries of traditional cultural cognition through an immersive “learning by doing” approach. Unlike conventional cultural presentations that often remain confined to didactic methods, craft experiences emphasize active physical participation and sensory interaction, effectively transforming the learner from a passive spectator into an engaged participant, thereby facilitating a deeper and more meaningful cultural understanding. Globally, there exist notable cultural differences in the design concepts and practical applications of craft study programmes. For instance, in Europe, Italy and the United Kingdom have emerged as popular destinations for craft study programmes in recent years—a trend closely linked to their long histories of traditional crafts, the implementation of protective cultural policies, and the prevailing aesthetic preferences among the public interested in crafts. Taking the example of the glass craft study in Murano, Italy, the programme focuses on the six foundational elements of craft—locality, handmade processes, tradition, originality, ecology, and the avoidance of excessive mechanical intervention (Penny Spark, Zhao Chengqing, Yang Yang, 2021). The glass study course in Murano not only underscores the importance of technical inheritance but also encourages innovative design, placing significant emphasis on the modern transformation of traditional crafts. Participants in this programme, while learning the delicate art of glass blowing in a workshop setting, are simultaneously tasked with creating a piece of glass art that incorporates contemporary artistic styles. This dual-track model of “tradition + innovation” has effectively elevated Murano glass from a mere local craft to a global design language, thereby broadening its appeal and cultural significance on the world stage.

In contrast, the Nishijin Weaving Study in Kyoto, Japan, is characterized by its focus on ritual and cultural immersion. In this programme, participants not only acquire technical skills in weaving but also engage in related cultural practices, such as the tea ceremony and flower arrangement, in order to fully experience and appreciate the spirit of Japanese aesthetics. This “skills + culture” composite curriculum design offers an important reference point for the development of craft study programmes in Jiangnan today. Comparatively, however, the current handicraft study programmes in the Jiangnan region remain predominantly centered on technical skill instruction, with cultural interpretation receiving relatively less emphasis. For example, many art colleges and universities in Jiangnan, in their summer and winter study programmes, tend to focus on short-term technical experiences rather than facilitating an in-depth exploration of the cultural metaphors underlying traditional patterns. Additionally, there is often a noticeable lack of corresponding technological innovations and breakthroughs, a tendency which emphasizes technique over literature and ultimately restricts the effectiveness of cross-cultural dissemination of these handicrafts.

In response to this limitation, recent years have witnessed the emergence of innovative projects that aim to transcend these constraints. One notable example is the “Folk Art Renaissance” workshop at the China Academy of Art, which integrates traditional blueprint techniques with contemporary art creation, inviting international students to produce artworks centered around the theme of “water.” This type of open curriculum design not only heightens the cultural participation of the participants but

also actively promotes the contemporary transformation of Jiangnan handicrafts. Furthermore, Suzhou Arts and Crafts Vocational and Technical College has, in recent years, been committed to establishing a non-heritage handicrafts inheritance system in Suzhou. By incorporating non-heritage programmes at various educational levels—including primary schools, secondary schools, and universities—the college has successfully endeavoured to animate Jiangnan handicrafts, making them more accessible and relevant. In addition to these initiatives, the college has hosted a series of non-heritage international cooperation workshops, which have been conducted in various formats such as hands-on workshops, detailed case studies, and engaging lectures. These efforts have been instrumental in leveraging international communication tools and cross-cultural communication skills to facilitate the global outreach of Jiangnan handicrafts.

Craft experience, by virtue of its unique cognitive reconstruction mechanism, is particularly effective in promoting cross-cultural understanding. Firstly, the inherently “slow and careful” nature of handicraft practices necessitates that learners decelerate their pace and engage fully with the immediate physical sensations, thereby allowing them to break free from entrenched cultural stereotypes. For example, in a study programme organized by the Yixing Zisha Museum, both domestic and international students experienced firsthand the resilience of clay through the tactile technique known as “body slapping.” This sensory engagement enabled them to connect with and ultimately understand the philosophical concept of “the unity of heaven and mankind” that underpins the creative process. Such a connection between physical experience and philosophical insight is challenging to replicate within the confines of traditional classroom lectures.

Secondly, the cyclical process of “failure-correction” inherent in handicraft practice provides a safe and constructive environment for cross-cultural learning. In virtually all forms of craft, emphasis is placed on the repetitive practice of skills. While highly skilled craftsmen may execute their craft with apparent ease, novices—often confronted with repeated failures due to a lack of proficiency in the “language” of the materials—find that these setbacks can promote a deeper understanding of the craft’s inherent complexities. This “learning from failure” approach closely mirrors the “growth mindset” commonly emphasized in Western educational contexts, thus offering a shared ground for cross-cultural dialogue.

In addition, the tangible “materiality” of handicrafts renders them potent carriers of cultural memory. For instance, in the study of woodcut New Year’s Paintings at the Jiangnan Craft Workshop of Suzhou University of Science and Technology, participants experienced the tangible weight of history simply by touching the textured surface of the woodblock. This direct material contact not only activated dormant cultural memories but also stimulated an emotional resonance among the participants, thereby reinforcing the cultural significance of the art form.

Ultimately, the greatest value of craft experience lies in its ability to transcend language and cultural barriers, thereby establishing a profound emotional connection between participants. This dialogic process—wherein the object itself serves as a medium—enables individuals to gain insights into other cultures while simultaneously reflecting on the unique qualities of their own. Moreover, the study of Jiangnan handicrafts has the potential to reveal the deep structural elements that constitute a culture. For example, when participants compare Jiangnan blue-printed fabric with Indian Bandhani print, they note that despite both techniques involving similar anti-dyeing processes, the underlying pattern designs reflect distinct cultural perceptions of

nature: Jiangnan patterns typically draw inspiration from water countryside landscapes and emphasize the harmonious coexistence of humanity and nature, whereas Indian patterns tend to be more geometrical, embodying symbols that represent cosmic order. This comparative analysis not only enriches the participants' cultural knowledge but also deepens their understanding of the diverse ways in which handicrafts serve as vessels of cultural expression.

In summary, craft study is not solely a means of cultural dissemination but also functions as a powerful cognitive reconstruction tool. Through active physical participation and immersive sensory interaction, learners are empowered to overcome entrenched cultural boundaries, thereby achieving a deeper understanding of other cultures. This enhanced understanding not only contributes to the reduction of cultural prejudice but also paves a practical path toward the establishment of a community with a shared human destiny.

4. Inter-subjective dialogue: paradigm shift from skills transfer to value symbiosis

Craft study is not only a transfer of skills but also a dialogue of culture. Through the medium of "objects," it connects individuals with diverse cultural backgrounds, forming an inter-subjective exchange field that facilitates mutual understanding and co-creation. This exchange transcends one-way cultural output by emphasizing two-way understanding and the joint construction of cultural meanings, thereby providing a robust framework for in-depth dialogue among different cultures around the world.

Traditional handicraft training has often been confined to a technical focus, emphasizing "standardisation" and "normalisation" while neglecting the multidimensional nature of the cultural context. For example, in the early days of Suzhou embroidery studies, international students were frequently required to adhere strictly to traditional stitching techniques. Although this approach ensured technical accuracy, it failed to evoke a deeper cultural resonance. In recent years, however, as cross-cultural research has advanced, handicraft studies have gradually shifted their focus from a purely "skill-centered" approach to one that fosters "cultural dialogue."

The inter-subjective dialogue inherent in the study of handicrafts emphasizes the co-creation of cultural values on a foundation of equality. Drawing on extensive experience at the Jiangnan Handicraft Workshop of Suzhou University of Science and Technology, it is evident that such dialogue can be achieved through a triadic approach: the cross-cultural translation of skills, the co-writing of stories, and the symbiosis and co-creation of values. For instance, in the study of glass mosaic painting, Korean participants initially experienced confusion when attempting to translate Jiangnan-themed Chinese paintings into the medium of glass mosaics. The philosophical connotation of "white is black" in Chinese paintings, which often evokes the concept of "white space" as a deliberate compositional tool, proved difficult to grasp. To bridge this cultural gap, the course designer introduced analogous expression techniques from the works of Suzy Ri—a popular Korean illustrator—who employs the notions of "white space in the picture" and "restraint in the words." This analogy helped participants understand the visual and conceptual similarities and differences between the two cultures, lowering the threshold of cultural awareness and stimulating creative inspiration.

Moreover, craftsmanship functions not only as a carrier of technology but also as a narrator of culture. In the Taohuayu Woodcut New Year's Paintings Study, participants were tasked with creating works based on the theme "Jiangnan in the Rhythm of Wu." In one instance, a Japanese participant merged the image of the "Gate God" found in

Taohuayu woodcut New Year's Paintings with the Japanese concept of "Dharma" to produce a silk enamel painting. This creative synthesis not only enriched the expressive potential of the New Year's paintings but also imbued traditional symbols with new cultural meanings. Through such co-writing of stories, participants were able not only to gain a deeper understanding of Jiangnan culture but also to critically re-examine and appreciate the uniqueness of their own cultural backgrounds.

Craft study embodies a dual function: it is both a means of transmitting technical skills and a dynamic process of cultural dialogue. By engaging learners in physical participation and sensory interaction, it breaks down linguistic and cultural barriers, paving the way for a profound emotional and intellectual connection between disparate cultural traditions. This process of cognitive reconstruction—facilitated by the translation of skills, co-creation of narratives, and collaborative development of values—contributes significantly to the formation of a global community that shares a common destiny.

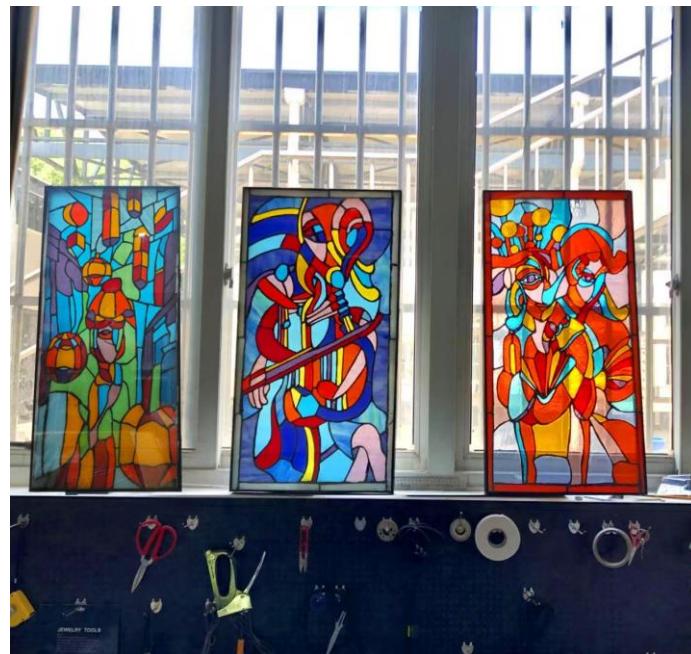


Figure 2. Juhao Li, *Kunqu Cubism - A Dream in the Garden*,
glass mosaic, 80 × 40 (cm), 2023

The ultimate goal of crafts study is to realise the symbiosis of cultural values. In one exemplary project in the glass workshop, Chinese participants and their European counterparts collaboratively created a series of glass works entitled "Kunqu and Cubism." By taking images derived from Kunqu—the classical Chinese opera—as the foundational elements, the work integrates advanced glass mosaic techniques, French glass baking colour technology, and modern sound control technology. This fusion of diverse technical methods symbolises not only the blending but also the symbiotic coexistence of Chinese and foreign cultural traditions. The installation comprises six flat, suspendable glass lamps, each of which features a sound-activated light positioned behind it. These lamps are imbued with four-character sound-activated commands drawn from classic excerpts of Kunqu opera, such as the audience's exclamation of "A Dream in the Garden." When activated, the light illuminates the glass component of the piece "Kunqu and Cubism - A Dream in the Garden" (Fig. 2), thereby creating a dynamic visual interplay that highlights both the technological innovation and the cultural dialogue embedded in the work. This kind of co-creation not only elevates the technical

proficiency of the participants but also deepens their understanding of the Jiangnan cultural community and its capacity to integrate diverse cultural narratives.

Furthermore, the course “Techniques and Expressions of Jiangnan Handicrafts” exemplifies how cross-cultural collaboration can foster collective memory and shared artistic expression. In this programme, members of a diverse group—hailing from different regions—collaborated to produce a series of public artworks entitled “Memories of Jiangnan.”(Fig. 3) These works utilise glass mosaic techniques as a medium to unite various elements emblematic of Jiangnan, such as human figures, flora, historical architecture, fauna, and garden landscapes. By adopting varied artistic styles, the series articulates a ‘universal artistic language’ that transcends regional specificities and invites a broader dialogue about visual culture. The installation is strategically located in the Jiang Yi Building, adjacent to the historic Hanshan Temple, thereby situating the artwork within a culturally and historically resonant context.

Through these initiatives, crafts study is redefined as a multifaceted practice that goes beyond the mere transfer of technical skills. It becomes a vital platform for cultural co-creation, where objects serve as mediators of dialogue and facilitators of cross-cultural understanding. By engaging in projects that interweave technical mastery with cultural symbolism, participants are encouraged to not only refine their craftsmanship but also to explore and contribute to a living, evolving cultural narrative—a narrative that ultimately aspires to the symbiosis of cultural values on a global scale.



Figure.3 A visitor stands in front of the series ‘Memories of Jiangnan’ to take a picture of the work, which consists of a combination of 18 glass pieces, each 40x40cm, 2023.

Traditionally, Chinese–foreign cultural exchanges have predominantly operated at the level of cultural displays, such as performances and exhibitions of cultural relics. While this mode of exchange has the capacity to attract audiences, it often falls short of fostering deep cultural understanding. Handicraft study, by contrast, promotes cultural

exchange through physical participation and emotional connection, thereby elevating the process from mere “display” to genuine “dialogue” and offering a practical pathway for cross-cultural understanding.

In the context of globalisation, cultural exchange has evolved from a one-way export to a two-way process of co-creation. Through the cross-cultural translation of skills and the collaborative co-writing of narratives, handicraft study achieves a symbiosis of cultural values. This co-creation process not only enriches the expressive potential of handicrafts but also injects new vitality into the diversity of world culture by opening up spaces for shared creative exploration and reinterpretation.

The practice of Jiangnan handicraft study demonstrates that cultural differences need not be a source of conflict but can instead serve as an opportunity for symbiosis. Through inter-subjective dialogue, individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds are enabled to transcend ingrained prejudices and achieve deep mutual understanding and collaboration. This understanding not only contributes to the resolution of cultural conflicts but also provides a concrete example of how a community of shared human destiny might be built through the practice of cultural exchange.

Although the study of handicrafts may begin with the mastery of seemingly “small” skills, it encapsulates the global significance of “big” culture. The medium of objects facilitates connections among individuals from various cultural backgrounds, thereby forming a cultural community that transcends geographical regions and linguistic boundaries. Such a community not only celebrates the rich diversity of cultures but also highlights the common values that bind humanity. The cross-cultural dissemination of Jiangnan skills thus has profound implications, both in terms of the sustainable conversion of cultural resources and the deepening of mutual understanding between Chinese and foreign cultures. This practice of “seeing the big in the small” vividly embodies the global significance of handicraft studies.

5. Summary

From long-term, continuous research and exploration at the Jiangnan Craft Workshop of Suzhou University of Science and Technology, it has been found that the practice of handicrafts serves as a powerful medium for inheriting and preserving the distinctive culture of the region. This inheritance is not limited to the transmission of technical skills; it also encompasses the cultural values embedded within these traditions, thereby providing an essential channel for the world to gain a deeper understanding of Jiangnan culture. Traditional handicrafts, as cultural symbols, offer those who experience, learn, and appreciate them an opportunity to grasp the vast breadth and depth of Chinese culture, consequently enhancing mutual cultural exchanges and understanding.

Moreover, the processes of handicraft production and exchange facilitate the establishment of friendships and cooperative relationships among participants from diverse regions. Through shared participation in the creation of handicrafts, individuals not only acquire technical expertise but also deepen their understanding of each other’s cultural backgrounds, thereby fostering the development of enduring interpersonal bonds.

Through inter-subjective dialogue, the Jiangnan Handicraft Study has achieved a paradigm shift from mere skill transfer to a dynamic symbiosis of cultural values. This transformation provides not only a novel pathway for cultural exchanges between China and other countries but also a practical model for facilitating in-depth dialogue among different cultures globally. As globalisation accelerates, craft studies are poised to play

an increasingly significant role in promoting cultural understanding, value co-creation, and international collaboration.

In an era when the theory of the clash of civilizations is frequently invoked, the Jiangnan Craft Study emerges as just one entry point. Given the diversity and extensive range of Chinese handicrafts, the transformation and rational utilisation of these sustainable cultural resources serve not only as a demonstration of the inheritance and innovation of technical skills but also as a micro-practice contributing to the broader construction of a community of human destiny.

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