

Translation Strategies based on Cultural Image and Symbolism in Chinese Ancient Poetry

-- A Case Study of Li Bai's Silent Night Thoughts

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Abstract: As the treasure of Chinese literature, ancient poetry contains rich cultural images. It is not only the crystallization of language art but also the carrier of cultural inheritance. Image and symbolism play an essential role in ancient Chinese poetry, which not only enriches the connotation of poetry but also brings challenges to translation. In the translation of ancient Chinese poetry, accurately conveying cultural images has become an essential task for translators. This paper takes one of the renowned Tang-dynasty poets, Li Bai's Silent Night Thoughts, as an example to explore the cultural images in ancient Chinese poetry and its translation strategies. Through the analysis of different versions of the poem translation, combined with the cultural background and language characteristics, this paper discusses the methods and techniques of the translation of cultural images and symbolism in ancient Chinese poetry in order to provide a new way of thinking and perspective for the translation of Chinese ancient poetry.

Keywords: Chinese Ancient Poetry; Cultural Image; Translation Strategy; Silent Night Thoughts by Li Bai.

1. Introduction

Chinese Ancient poetry is the essence of Chinese literature, and its cultural image is deeply rooted in the cultural heart of the Chinese people. In ancient poetry, image and symbolism are their unique forms of expression, embedding the poet's feelings and thoughts and reflecting the social culture and aesthetic concepts of that time. However, due to the differences in language and culture, the translation of ancient Chinese poems often faces many challenges, one of which is how to convey the cultural images contained in them accurately. As a classic work in Chinese classical poetry, Li Bai's Silent Night Thoughts not only expresses the poet's longing for his hometown but also embodies the unique images of the moon and night in Chinese culture. Therefore, taking Silent Night Thoughts as an example, this article mainly discusses the cultural image in ancient poetry and its translation strategy, which has important theoretical and practical significance.

2. Image and Symbolism in Chinese Ancient Poetry

2.1. The role of image and symbolism in Chinese ancient poetry

Image refers to the language symbols used in poetry to describe the image of things or express feelings and thoughts. The Cambridge Dictionary defines an image as a mental picture or idea that forms in a reader's or listener's mind from the words that they read or hear. Images in ancient Chinese poetry often have multiple meanings, which can not only directly depict the image of things but also metaphor the poet's emotions or express specific artistic conception. For example, in Li Bai's The Moon Shines Everywhere, translated by William John Bainbridge Fletcher, "Seeing the moon before my couch so bright, I thought hoar frost had fallen from the night." (25), the bright moonlight and frost on the

ground are not only physical images but also have symbolic meanings beyond physical images, representing the loneliness and homesickness in the poet's heart.

Symbolism was initially used to refer to an influential movement in European literature and the visual arts from about 1885 to 1910. Specifically, in symbolism literature, authors often use symbolism as a rhetorical device in writing, denying empty rhetoric and blunt preaching and emphasizing the use of textured images and the methods of hinting, setting off, comparing and associating to create their works. In addition, symbolism literature pays more attention to musicality and rhythm. In ancient Chinese poetry, symbolism often expresses the poet's feelings and thoughts through natural scenery, animals and plants, etc., which has profound cultural connotation and symbolic significance. For example, in Wang Wei's Autumn Evening in the Mountains, another Chinese classic poem translated by Xu Yuanchong, there are words "mountain", "rain", "day", and "autumn" in the first two sentences are not only the description of natural scenery but also the poet's reverence for nature and thinking about life, which has far-reaching symbolic significance.

2.2. Challenges of images and symbolism in the translation of Chinese ancient poetry

The images and symbolism in ancient poetry often have specific cultural connotations and emotional colours, so they frequently encounter many challenges in the process of translation. First of all, the images and symbols in ancient Chinese poetry are often culture-specific, which requires the translator to have profound cultural literacy and understanding of the background of the original poem to grasp its connotation accurately. Secondly, the images and symbols in ancient Chinese poetry often have multiple meanings, and translators need to skillfully transform and express them on the basis of maintaining the original meaning so as to make the translation not only faithful to the original but also easy to understand. Finally, the language form of ancient Chinese poetry often has a sense of rhythmic beauty

and rhythm. Translators need to maintain the rhythm of poetry while maintaining the integrity of images and symbols, which puts forward higher requirements for translators' language skills and literary accomplishment.

3. Taking Li Bai's Silent Night Thoughts as an Example to Explore the Translation Strategies of Cultural Images and Symbolism in the Translation of Chinese Ancient Poetry

3.1. Cultural Image of Li Bai's Silent Night Thoughts

Silent Night Thoughts is a seven-word poem created by Li Bai, which is regarded as a classic of ancient Chinese poetry. In the poem, Li Bai describes a quiet night in fresh and elegant language, expressing his longing for his hometown. The poem contains a wealth of cultural imagery, the most prominent of which are the moon, frost and homesickness.

There are some important images and symbolism analyses in the poem, as follows: The first is the image of the moon. In Chinese culture, the moon is endowed with rich symbolic significance, representing loneliness, solitude, homesickness and so on. In Silent Night Thoughts, the sentence "bright moonlight before bed" directly depicts the brightness and clarity of the moon while suggesting the poet's loneliness and homesickness in his heart. The second one is frost. Frost is often seen as a symbol of cold, cold and loneliness in Chinese culture. The second sentence in the poem further expresses the poet's longing for his hometown through the metaphor of frost, which increases the emotional colour of the poem. The poem's symbolism is homesickness. Silent Night Thoughts expresses the poet's longing and affection for his hometown, which is one of the common themes in ancient Chinese poetry. In the poem, the last two verses directly express the poet's deep feelings of homesickness and homesickness, which complement each other with the moon, frost and other images, forming the unique artistic conception and emotion of the poem.

These cultural images and symbolism not only enrich the connotation of poetry but also challenge its translation. Then, the following content will discuss the strategies and methods of translating cultural images in ancient poetry through the analysis of several different versions of the English translation of Silent Night Thoughts.

3.2. Analysis of the English Translation of Silent Night Thoughts

When discussing the English translation of Li Bai's Silent Night Thoughts, I chose three different versions of the translation and analyzed the specific translation strategies. Here are three different versions of Silent Night Thoughts in English translation:

Version 1:

A Tranquil Night
Xu Yuanchong
Abed, I see a silver light,
I wonder if its frost aground.
Looking up, I find the moon bright;
Bowing, in homesickness I'm drowned.

Version 2:

Thoughts in a Tranquil Night
L. Crammer - Byng
Athwart the bed
I watch the moonbeam cast a trail
So bright, so cold, so frail,
That for a space it gleams
Like hoar - frost on the margin of my dreams.
I raise my head,
The splendid moon I see;
Then droop my head,
And sink to dreams of thee -
My fatherland, of thee!

Version Three:

Thoughts in the Silent Night
Beside my bed a pool of light—
Is it hoarfrost on the ground?
I lift my eyes and see the moon,
I bend my head and think of home.
(Translated by Yang Xian-yi and Dai Nai-die)

In elaborating on the connection between the translation strategies and cultural images of the three English versions, the paper can discuss them from the following aspects:

3.2.1. Presentation of Cultural Images

In Li Bai's Silent Night Thoughts, the moon, frost, homesickness, and other cultural images play an essential role. These images are not only the depiction of objects in poetry but also the expression of the poet's emotions and inner world, reflecting the ancient Chinese poets' unique perception of nature and human feelings. Version one uses "moon bright" to express the colour of the moon, highlighting its brightness. This translation is in line with English readers' general understanding of the moon, and at the same time, it is easier for readers to associate with vivid words. Version two uses "Athwart, the bed; I watch the moonbeam cast a trail" to highlight the position of the moonlight in front of the poet's bed, vividly expressing the scene in the poem. This translation more vividly shows the poet's actions through the verb "watch". At the same time, through "So bright, so cold, so frail," the bright moonlight is expressed, implying the current atmosphere. Version three's "Beside my bed, a pool of light" similarly emphasizes the position of the moonlight and uses "watch the bright moon" to express the poet gazing at the moon.

Secondly, from the perspective of the presentation of cultural images, every translator tries to reproduce the Chinese cultural images in the original poem in English when choosing words and expressions. In the first version, "homesickness" conveys nostalgia for one's hometown and embodies the emotional experiences unique to Chinese people. The second version enhances the visual and emotional effects of the poem with words such as "hoarfrost" and "fatherland". It expresses the poet's deep love for his country by referring to "fatherland". The last version, through the expressions of "Silent Night" and "homesickness" in the translation, links Chinese literature with Western culture and enhances the cross-cultural significance of the poem. Therefore, different versions have different emphases in the presentation of cultural images, but they are all committed to

reproducing the artistic connotation of the original poem in English.

In the three English versions, the translators try to convey the artistic conception and emotion of the original poem to the English readers through the transformation and expression of these cultural images. For example, the three versions all retain the images of the original poem, such as moonlight, frost, and looking up at the moon, but there are differences in expression. For example, "Wonder if it frosts aground." in version one and "Is it hoarfrost on the ground?" in version three. Both use "frost" to express the image of frost, while Version two uses "Like hoarfrost on the margin of my dreams" to express a similar, but more euphemistic, meaning.

3.2.2. Selection of translation strategies

There are some differences in the translation strategies of the three English versions of the original poem. The first version chose a literal translation and retained the simplicity and freshness of the original poem, striving to reproduce the artistic conception and emotion of the original poem in English, such as "moon bright" and "wonder if its frost", highlighting the brightness and clarity of the moonlight, as well as the speculation of frost. The second version pays more attention to the vividness of images and the expression of emotions adopts more vivid language and adds the longing for the motherland in the poem. The third version, through the connection with Western culture and a more abstract way of expression, presents the poem with a unique mood and emotion. Therefore, different translation strategies directly determine the effect of poetry in English and the way of conveying cultural images.

3.2.3. Relation between cultural image and language expression

In the three versions of the translation, there is a close relationship between cultural image and language expression. Through different language choices and expressions, translators try to combine the artistic images in the original poem with the cultural background and language habits of English readers so as to make the translation more readable and expressive. For example, the moon symbolizes loneliness, homesickness, and other emotions in Chinese culture, while frost represents cold, cold, and different meanings.

The translators of these three versions tried to present the cultural images in the original poems by choosing appropriate language expressions. Through the transformation and expression of these images, the translators convey the feelings and thoughts of the original poem to the English readers. For example, the first version conveys the connotation of Chinese culture through literal translation and retains the simplicity and freshness of the original poem. The second version enhances the visual and emotional effects of the poem by using more vivid language and increasing the feeling of longing for the motherland. The third version, through the connection with Western culture and a more abstract way of expression, presents the poem with a unique mood and emotion. Therefore, the correlation between cultural image and language expression directly determines the effect of poetry in English.

3.2.4. Language style and sense of rhythm

The three versions also have their characteristics in terms of the expression of language style and rhythm. Translators try to make the translation more fluent and rhythmical through the organization of the poem and the control of the rhythm of the language. For example, the language style of

version one retains the simplicity and freshness of the original poem, and the language is concise and clear, without too much decoration and gorgeous words. For example, the "homesickness" in the translation directly conveys the nostalgia for one's hometown, which reflects the poet's deep feelings. The rhythm of this version is relatively smooth, and each sentence is of moderate length without too much variation and emphasis. This gentle rhythm echoes the tranquil night atmosphere of the original poem. The second version pays more attention to the expression of emotion and vividness of the image and enhances the sense of rhythm of the poem. For example, words such as "moonbeam cast a trail" and "Like hoar - frost on the margin of my dreams." add to the sense of imagery of the poem. The rhythm of this version is relatively varied, and the sentence structure is varied, sometimes longer and sometimes shorter, making the rhythm of the poem more lively and exciting. The third version of the poem presents a unique sense of rhythm and rhythm through a more abstract way of expression and connection with Western culture. For example, the translation of "Silent Night" echoes "Silent Night" in the Western Christmas, adding to the cross-cultural significance of the poem. The language in this version is more abstract, with no apparent sentence structure and rhythm, making the rhythm of the poem more hazy and ethereal.

To sum up, the three English versions adopted different translation strategies in the translation of Li Bai's Silent Night Thoughts, which not only retained the cultural image and emotional connotation of the original poem but also made adjustments according to the characteristics of English language and readers' habits, so as to translate more appreciated by English readers and literary significance. Through the analysis of the correlation between cultural image and language expression, we can better understand the translators' strategy choice and language transformation in the translation process, as well as the value and significance of poetry in cross-cultural communication.

3.3. Translation strategies of images and symbolism in Chinese ancient poetry

In view of the translation challenges brought by images and symbolism in ancient Chinese poetry and the analysis of the English translation of Li Bai's Silent Night Thoughts, translators can adopt the following strategies:

First of all, the translator needs to deeply understand the background and cultural connotation of the original poem and grasp the deep meaning of the image and symbol. Only with a deep understanding of the original poem can we accurately grasp the image and symbol in it so as to translate it better.

Secondly, the translator should pay attention to the cultural adaptability of the target text and carry out appropriate cultural transformation according to the target audience and background. In the process of translation, proper adjustments should be made according to the target audience and cultural background so that the target text is not only faithful to the original text but also conforms to the local cultural habits and aesthetic taste.

In addition, translators need to flexibly use translation skills and techniques to skillfully deal with the transformation and expression of images and symbols. In the process of translation, various translation techniques and techniques can be used, such as free translation, personification, borrowing, etc., to make the translation more expressive and appealing.

Finally, the translation should keep the rhythmic beauty

and sense of rhythm of the poem, and the translator should pay attention to the harmony of the sound and rhythm of the translation. Ancient poetry is a kind of language art, and its language form has a sense of rhythm and beauty. Translators should keep the rhythm and rhythm of poetry as much as possible in the translation process so as to maintain the overall beauty and literary value of the translation.

4. Conclusion

The image and symbolism in ancient Chinese poetry are their unique forms of expression, which have rich cultural connotations and profound symbolic significance. When translating ancient poetry, translators need to have a deep understanding of the background and cultural connotation of the original poem, flexibly use various translation skills and techniques, and maintain the rhyme and rhythm of the poem so as to convey the image and symbol of the original poem accurately. Through the analysis and study of the image and symbolism in ancient poetry, we can provide a new way of thinking and perspective for the translation of ancient poetry and promote the inheritance and development of ancient poetry.

Through the analysis of the cultural images and their English translation, it can be found that the translation of ancient poetry involves the transmission of cultural images and the transformation of language expression, which is a challenging and significant task. When translating ancient poetry, translators need to deeply understand the cultural background and artistic conception of the original poem and flexibly use various translation strategies and techniques to maintain the faithfulness and expressiveness of the translation. At the same time, translators also need to combine the linguistic characteristics of the target language and the

cultural background of the readers to make appropriate adjustments and transformations so as to make the translation more readable and appreciated. The analysis and discussion of the translation strategies of cultural images in ancient poetry can provide a new way of thinking and perspective for the translation of ancient poetry and promote the inheritance and development of ancient poetry.

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