

Chinese-English Translation of Garden Imagery in Tourist Attraction Descriptions from the Perspective of “Three Beauties Theory”: A Case Study of Lotus Garden in Huzhou

Zhehao Zhang^{a,*}, Jingxiao Wang^b, Yishu Zhuang^c

Department of English, Huzhou College, Huzhou 313000, China

^{a,*} zhangzh2003@126.com, ^b wjx020616@icloud.com, ^c zhuangyishu@zjhzu.edu.cn

Abstract: This paper examines the translation of garden imagery in the introduction texts of Huzhou Lotus Garden from the perspective of the “Three Beauties Theory”. It categorizes the imagery and identifies issues such as cultural loss, style deviations, terminology inconsistencies, and the neglect of target cultures. Proposed are tailored translation techniques that align with the beauties of sense, sound, and form, aiming to enhance text quality and the reading experiences of tourists. This study refines the translation of tourist attractions and inspires cross-cultural communication.

Keywords: Garden Translation; Tourism Translation; Three Beauties Theory; Huzhou.

1. Introduction

As the tide of globalization surges forward, China’s cultural exchanges have surged. Tourist attractions, embodying China’s culture, rely on quality translations for global influence. However, issues such as inaccuracies and inappropriate expressions hinder international communication. Therefore, intensifying research and refining translation techniques for tourist attraction introductions is an urgent and crucial topic.

Chinese gardens, rich in imagery and culture, require nuanced translations that preserve accuracy, charm, and aesthetics. Language and culture gaps pose challenges. Effective translation techniques for garden imagery are crucial for setting standards in tourism translation and facilitating cultural exchange. Xu Yuanchong’s “Three Beauties Theory” is valuable in literature, but has been under-explored in the context of tourism. Its integration into Chinese-English translation of garden imagery provides fresh perspectives, enhancing faithfulness to the essence of garden imagery.

The Lotus Garden in Huzhou enchants tourists with its scenery and heritage. Analyzing the translation techniques of its introduction text from Chinese to English can enhance translation quality and provide insights for similar attractions. This study, grounded in the “Three Beauties Theory”, examines the translations of the Lotus Garden, aiming to raise the standards of tourism translation and promote cultural exchange.

2. Literature Review

Delforouz (2012) establishes a foundation for understanding the complexities of translating proper names, emphasizing their cultural significance and the need for nuanced translations that balance linguistic accuracy and cultural sensitivity. Galewska Karolina (2019) takes a cognitive approach, highlighting the importance of cognitive processes in translating Chinese proper names and addressing the challenges of balancing linguistic form with cultural

meaning. Chen Yujia et al. (2024) and Yanyan Zheng et al. (2024) explore the aesthetics and tourism potential of Chinese classical gardens. Chen et al. uncover the interplay of space, time, and movement within Jingxinzhai Garden, elucidating the “scenes changing as steps move” principle that is central to Chinese garden aesthetics. Zheng et al. examine the tourist gaze, exploring how traditional aesthetic principles (Yijing) manifest in tourism, enhancing understanding of cultural heritage communication and preservation through the lens of tourism. Studies across various domains, ranging from proper name translation to Chinese garden aesthetics and tourism, underscore the importance for cultural sensitivity and nuanced representation in cross-cultural communication. Translating proper names tied to cultural heritage necessitates cultural proficiency, resonating with Zhou Yong and Li Yingbo’s (2023) analysis of Xu Yuanchong’s “Three Beauties Theory”. This theory highlights the significance of preserving sense, sound, and form beauty, which is essential for accurately and respectfully conveying cultural essence and aesthetic values in translations and garden presentations.

3. Theoretical Framework

“Three Beauties Theory”, proposed by the renowned translator Xu Yuanchong, advocates for the harmonious integration of “beauty in sense”, “beauty in sound”, and “beauty in form” during the translation process.

Respectively, “beauty in sense” refers to a translation’s ability to convey the aesthetic ambience and emotional depth of the original text, allowing readers of the translation to appreciate the sentiments and nuances embedded therein. “Beauty in sound” pertains to the translation’s reproduction of the original’s phonological beauty, resulting in the translated text being melodious and rhythmically pleasing to the ear. “Beauty in form” emphasizes the preservation of the original’s formal elegance, ensuring that the translated text harmoniously aligns with the original in structure, exuding a sense of orderliness and symmetry.

The application of “Three Beauties Theory” in translation practice not only enhances the quality of translations but also

fosters cross-cultural exchange and dissemination. By striving for a harmonious unity of sense, sound, and form, translators can create translations that are both faithful to the original and artistically rich, enabling readers from diverse cultural backgrounds to share in the experience of beauty.

4. Classifications of Garden Imagery

The Lotus Garden in Huzhou embodies a rich tapestry of garden imagery in its introductory texts. It not only showcases the essence of traditional Chinese garden art but also exemplifies the harmony between man and nature. Based on the themes and forms expressed by these imagery, the garden imagery of it can be broadly categorized into the following four categories.

Natural landscape imagery is the prominent feature of the Lotus Garden, where water bodies, rocks, and vegetation are all integral to the design. Water, the lifeblood of the garden, meanders throughout, its reflective surface mirroring the surrounding pavilions and towers. The rocks are arrayed in two forms: as piled-up mountains and as individual stones. Vegetation, essential for creating a landscape, is arranged in a natural manner, highlighting organic growth over symmetry. Notably, lotus flowers, the signature feature of this garden, bloom into a stunning display, attracting numerous visitors.

The architectural landscape imagery is equally distinctive. Wooden frameworks enable the seamless connection between interior and exterior spaces, blending small architectural spaces with the vastness of nature. The diverse types of Chinese garden architecture, such as halls, pavilions, studios, verandas, terraces, towers, galleries, corridors, and bridges, serve both practical and aesthetic purposes.

The Cultural landscape imagery is also rich in cultural symbolism. Inscriptions, couplets, and other cultural elements not only chronicle the garden's historical evolution but also convey profound cultural heritage. Visitors, while admiring the scenery, can also savor the vastness of Chinese culture.

Beyond natural and architectural landscapes, humanistic emotional imagery communicates profound humanistic emotions through its garden imagery. From secluded paths to serene courtyards, visitors experience a sense of rejuvenation and relaxation, as if returning to the embrace of nature.

5. Major Problems in Existing Translations of Garden Imagery

Despite the rich diversity of garden imagery present in the Lotus Garden, its translation into English encounters several key challenges, which primarily manifest in four aspects.

Firstly, the lack of cultural connotation is an issue. Many garden imagery carry profound cultural meanings that are often not fully captured in English translations. For instance, specific cultural vocabulary or expressions may not have direct equivalents in English, which can lead to distortions or losses of the original intent.

Secondly, there are disparities in linguistic style. Chinese garden texts generally aim for creating profound moods and concise expressions, whereas English favors clarity and precision. Achieving a balance between these two styles to preserve the original's charm while appealing to the preferences of English readers is a challenge.

Thirdly, there is an issue with inconsistent translation of terminology in garden imagery. The field encompasses numerous technical terms that can be translated into English in various ways. The lack of standardized translation norms

allows different translators to take different approaches, leading to multiple translations of the same term across different texts and potentially confusing readers.

Lastly, there is a disregard for the cultural backgrounds of the target readers. Sometimes, the English translation of garden imagery overlooks these cultural nuances and aesthetic preferences specific to the target audience. Consequently, such translations may accurately convey the original information but fail to resonate with or pique the interest of readers.

6. Chinese-English Translation of Garden Imagery in Tourist Attraction Descriptions from the Perspective of “Three Beauties Theory”: A Case Study of Lotus Garden in Huzhou

To address the issues raised in the preceding chapter, the author adopts the “Three Beauties Theory” as a guiding principle for translation efforts, adeptly incorporating four key translation techniques: conversion, addition and omission, inversion, and change of voices.

6.1. Conversion

Conversion serves as a versatile tool in the translator's arsenal. Typically, English uses prepositions, pronouns, and conjunctions to connect independent nouns, creating intricate noun phrases and sentences. In contrast, Chinese depends more heavily on word order to link nouns and sentences. To ensure a harmonious blend of readability and aesthetic appeal when translating the names of classical garden attractions, the careful use of conversion becomes essential.

Illustrative Case: 松雪斋

Original Translation: Pine and Snow Hall

Tourist Attraction Context: Nestled within the Lotus Garden, “Pine and Snow Hall” is named in homage to Zhao Mengfu, also known as “The Holy Man of Pine and Snow”. This historic building served as Zhao's study for calligraphy and hosted gatherings with friends, where his collected works were preserved. Amidst towering pines and blanketed by snow during winter, the hall exudes a profound tranquility, embodying a seamless fusion of human ingenuity and natural splendor. Considering its function and historical background, it can be regarded as Zhao's study amidst the pines.

Critique of Existing Translation: Although “Pine and Snow Hall” conveys the literal meaning of “pine” and “snow”, it does not capture the tranquil and elegant atmosphere of the original, resulting in a linguistic imbalance.

Revised Translation Approach: By translating the Chinese noun “雪” into the English adjective “Snowy”, the adjective “Snowy” modifies the noun “Pines” to describe them as snow-covered. The preposition “amid” is strategically introduced to connect the central subject “Study” with “amid snowy pines” functioning as a post-positive attribute, which enhances the descriptive power. This rendition not only reflects the imagery of winter, snow, pines, and the study but also evokes the poetic vision of “a glimpse of a study amid the snow-clad pines”. Additionally, alliteration adds to the rhythmic appeal of the original text, preserving its graceful form in the translation.

Revised Translation: Study Amid Snowy Pines

6.2. Addition and Omission

Addition and omission in translation are strategic maneuvers that aim not at altering the core meaning but at enhancing clarity, vividness, and conciseness. These two techniques frequently function in tandem, complementing each other's strengths. For instance, logical connectors, modifiers, and words that reflect the theme may be added, while functional words such as pronouns, prepositions, and conjunctions might be omitted. The challenge lies in striking a balance between inclusion and exclusion to ensure that those words which impede understanding are left unspoken, while those that enhance comprehension are appropriately included.

Illustrative Case: 顾渚烟云

Original Translation: GUZHU Mount in Mist

Tourist Attraction Context: "GUZHU Mount in Mist" evokes the poetic sentiments expressed in Zeng Gong's verse from the Song Dynasty, where distant mountains are veiled in misty clouds, inspiring a sense of ethereal beauty. "GUZHU" refers to Guzhu Mountain, a renowned locale steeped in history and natural wonders.

Critique of Existing Translation: The translation "GUZHU Mount in Mist" though literal, fails to convey the poetic essence of the name and could potentially confuse English readers who are not familiar with Guzhu Mountain.

Revised Translation Approach: To enhance readability and evoke the desired imagery, it is better to modify the translation by adding descriptive elements and omitting the direct use of the Chinese proper name unless it is widely recognized. Alliteration also makes it easier to read. The revised translation is also more structured.

Revised Translation: Mountain in Mist

6.3. Inversion

Inversion is a technique frequently employed during the translation of lengthy English sentences into Chinese. This is because the order of elements in some extended English sentences can differ significantly from, or be diametrically opposed to, that of Chinese expressions. As a result, the translation process often requires starting from the end of the original English text.

Illustrative Case: 花妃窠

Original Translation: Flower Queen Archway

Tourist Attraction Context: Entering the gate of Qian Garden and turning left through the "Flower Queen Archway", one can see a long hallway leading to winding corridors.

Critique of Existing Translation: The term "花妃" does not refer to an actual queen, but rather serves as a beautified or symbolic name for flowers. Additionally, the term "窠" in Chinese does not directly translate to "Archway", but rather indicates a tranquil hallway.

Revised Translation Approach: By adding the preposition "in" and the present participle "Flourishing", the post-positive attributive "in Flourishing Flowers" is formed to modify the central subject "Hallway", which reflects the beauty of the garden image reminiscent of "walking in a quiet hallway, surrounded by vibrant flowers". Additionally, alliteration is employed to make the translation more engaging and catchy.

Revised Translation: Hallway in Flourishing Flowers

6.4. Change of Voices

The prevalence of the passive voice in English and the active voice in Chinese requires adjustments in voice when

translating between the two languages. Due to their distinct usage patterns, a direct, literal translation can often lead to expressions that do not align with idiomatic English. Consequently, when translating scenic spot names from classical gardens into English, it becomes essential to use the passive voice to ensure a more authentic and natural rendering that resonates with English speakers.

Illustrative Case: 印水山房

Original Translation: Water-mirrored Pavilion

Tourist Attraction Context: The term "印水山房" originates from the artificial "mountain" within the garden, constructed beside the lake. Here, the term "mountain" refers to the rockery that is piled up within the garden. In this scenic spot, the relationship between the "Pavilion" and the two elements of "Water" and "Rockery" is fundamentally passive; the "Pavilion" is embraced by the "Rockery" and is reflected in the "Water".

Critique of Existing Translation: Although "Water-mirrored" effectively captures the image of water as a mirror, it does not effectively convey the interdependence between the "Rockery" and the "Pavilion."

Revised Translation Approach: The phrase "印水" (literally meaning "imprinted by water") is not translated directly; instead, a passive voice construction "Water-Mirrored" is used to preserve the essence of reflection. "Rockery-Nestled" is introduced to explicitly convey the pavilion's position within the rockery. Both the original and translated versions employ consonance and maintain a parallel structure with four words, striving for a meticulous and beautiful rhyme while remaining faithful to the original text's form and content.

Revised Translation: Pavilion Rockery-Nestled and Water-Mirrored

7. Conclusion

Guided by the principles of "beauty in sense, sound, and form", this study identifies shortcomings in existing translated texts and suggests enhancements through the application of learned translation techniques, leading to the following conclusions.

Firstly, translation issues still exist in the Lotus Garden introduction texts and their resolution strategies. Currently, there are several problems with the English translations, including a lack of cultural connotations, discrepancies in linguistic styles, inconsistencies in the translation of terminology, and a failure to consider the cultural backgrounds of the target readers. To improve these translations, it is necessary to strengthen research on garden culture, improve translators' cross-cultural communication skills, establish standardized norms for terminology translation, and take into full account the reading habits and aesthetic preferences of the target audience.

Secondly, the application of "Three Beauties Theory" in translation practice can enhance the accuracy of conveying the charm and essence of gardens. Attention should be paid to preserving the original artistic conception, while also focusing on achieving harmony in both sounds and visual effects within the translation.

Thirdly, we can classify the imagery in the Lotus Garden into categories such as natural landscapes, architectural landscapes, cultural landscapes, and humanistic emotions. This classification not only reveals the intricate interplay between the physical and spiritual realms depicted in the

garden but also underscores the meticulous craftsmanship and profound philosophical intentions of the creators. Ultimately, such an analysis contributes to a more comprehensive appreciation of the Lotus Garden as a microcosm of cultural, aesthetic, and emotional values.

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