

Research on English Translation and Overseas Dissemination of Chinese Calligraphy

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Abstract: This article explores the aesthetic value and profound connotations of Chinese calligraphy as well as the translating strategies for its overseas dissemination. By comparison and contrast of different translation such as literal translation, free translation and intersemiotic translation, the article summarizes that the theory of intersemiotic translation provides a new perspective and methodological guidance for translating Chinese calligraphy into English. The article also analyzes the current situation and challenges during disseminating Chinese calligraphy overseas, and proposes combining new media and network technology is an effective means for overseas dissemination of Chinese calligraphy.

Keywords: Chinese Calligraphy; Intersemiotic Translation; Overseas Dissemination.

1. Introduction

Chinese calligraphy, condensed from five thousand years of Chinese civilization, has firmly attracted the attention of the world due to its unique aesthetic value and profound Eastern cultural connotations. However, by reason of its unique brushwork, rich Eastern aesthetics and philosophical connotations, as well as the special carrier of Chinese characters, it has brought challenges to the translation and introduction of Chinese calligraphy art.

2. The Beauty and Complexity of Chinese Calligraphy

Chinese calligraphy is a microcosm of over 5000 years of traditional Chinese culture, and it is also a unique form of artistic expression which combines visual beauty and imagery in the same Chinese character. It pursues the expressive power of lines, showcasing the beauty of characters through different calligraphic techniques such as brushwork, structure, composition, and so on. Incomparable to the Western writing, such calligraphic technique terms are meaningful in culture yet difficult to starve for. To be specific, brushwork refers to the way a calligrapher handles a brush and the lines of the character are formed, structure shows how the lines are arranged together to turn into a complete character and composition displays the beauty of a piece of calligraphy work by the amazing arrangement of Chinese characters. To disseminate the unique aesthetic beauty of Chinese calligraphy to the world is urgent yet challenging especially for translating calligraphic text into foreign languages accurately and appropriately. E.g., Chinese calligraphy emphasizes the strength and rhythm of strokes, meaning the handling of brush and even the direction of ink flowing are in accordance with the calligrapher's will uninhibitedly. The dynamic beauty and rhythmic sense contained in such calligraphic works are accordingly difficult to convey in text translation. Chinese calligraphy also pursues the harmony and unity between characters and characters, lines and lines in order to emphasize the overall layout and momentum.

Secondly, the profound cultural connotations contained in Chinese calligraphy are also a major difficulty in English translation. Calligraphy is not only an art form, but also a

cultural carrier. It carries various cultural information such as Chinese history, philosophy, literature, etc. In the process of English translation, how to accurately convey such cultural information so that Western readers can truly understand the cultural value of calligraphy is an urgent problem to be solved. For example, the poetry and postscript in calligraphy works often contain rich cultural connotations. If translated only according to the literal meanings, it is absolutely difficult to express the deep meanings behind them.

In response to the above issues, we can explore effective translation strategies and methods from the perspective of intersemiotic translation. Intersemiotic translation emphasizes the conversion and correspondence between symbols, focusing on the equivalence of meaning, form, and function between the source language and the target language. During translating Chinese calligraphy into English, we can draw on the concept of intersemiotic translation, establish a correspondence between calligraphy terminology and Western art terminology by seeking commonalities between Chinese and Western cultures, and thus achieve cross-cultural dissemination of calligraphy art.

To deeply understand and explore the artistic as well as cultural connotations so as to provide a solid theoretical foundation is essential and necessary for the English translation work. Through translation practice, it is suggestive to explore effective translation techniques by comparing and analyzing various texts of translations. In addition, it is meaningful to promote cultural exchange and mutual learning by communication and cooperation with the Western art world, considering the aesthetic needs and acceptance habits of Western readers to strongly support the international dissemination of calligraphy English translation.

3. Strategies for Translating Chinese Calligraphy into English

3.1. A Brief Introduction of Intersemiotic Translation Theory

Language is the core of culture and the most important symbol system. Saussure[1] held that "language is a system of symbols for expressing ideas", such as writing systems, Braille, military signals, and so on. People can use language to describe images, mathematical formulas, dances, and even

musicals, so it is not surprising that there are various symbols and forms of meaning in language.

Intersemiotic translation was initially proposed by Jakobson[2], the most influential translation theorist of the Prague School, who referred to “explaining linguistic symbols through nonverbal symbol systems, or using linguistic symbols to explain nonverbal symbols”.

According to Jakobson’s theory of semiotic translation, translation can be divided into three types: intralingual translation, interlingual translation, and interlingual translation. Intersemiotic translation refers to the translation between different symbol systems, such as translating text into images or music, etc. As a special type of translation, intersemiotic translation, focuses on the communication between different symbol systems rather than the equivalent substitution at the linguistic level.

As a treasure of Chinese culture, Chinese calligraphy involves not only the conversion of language and characters, but also the transmission of Chinese culture and art in its English translation. Traditional literal translation often fails to fully express the deep connotations of calligraphy, while intersemiotic translation can play an important role in this regard. It emphasizes the correspondence between symbols and the reconstruction of meaning, allowing for a greater preservation of the original artistic conception and aesthetic value of calligraphy during the translation process. By intersemiotic translation, a variety of symbolic elements such as images, lines, and even colors are used to present the artistic charm of calligraphy in a more intuitive and vivid way, which not only enhances the target language audience’s perception and understanding of calligraphy but also promotes the dissemination and acceptance of Chinese calligraphy on the international stage.

3.2. The Application of Literal Translation and Free Translation in Translating Calligraphy into English

When exploring the strategies of translating Chinese calligraphy into English, literal translation and free translation are two commonly mentioned methods. Literal translation method, as the name suggests, refers to directly translating the literal meaning of the original text, trying to maintain the form and structure of the original text as much as possible. In the practice of translating Chinese calligraphy into English, literal translation can to some extent preserve the artistic charm and cultural characteristics of calligraphy, which helps readers to have a more intuitive understanding of the connotation of Chinese calligraphy art. However, literal translation also has its limitations. For instance, due to cultural and linguistic differences between the East and the West, literal translation may sometimes lead to semantic distortion or ambiguity, and even cause misunderstandings among readers. Moreover, for calligraphy works with profound cultural connotations and specific historical backgrounds, literal translation often fails to accurately convey their deep meanings.

In contrast, free translation focuses more on conveying the meaning and ideas of the original text, rather than just the literal meaning. In the translation of Chinese calligraphy into English, free translation can better adapt to the cultural background and expression of the target language, making it easier for readers to understand and accept. The advantage of free translation lies in its flexibility and adaptability. It can make necessary adjustments and reconstructions to the original text according to specific contexts and the needs of

target readers, in order to more accurately convey the artistic and cultural connotations of calligraphy. Especially when dealing with some poetic calligraphy works, the free translation method can better restore the author’s emotions and artistic conception, allowing readers to have a deeper understanding of the charm of Chinese calligraphy.

For example, *yi* (逸) is a core concept in Chinese aesthetics, and there are some *yi*-related expressions such as *piaoyi* (飘逸), *qingyi* (清逸) and *xiaosapiaoyi* (潇洒飘逸). By free translation, *yi* (逸) shares different translations in Chinese calligraphy. To express the running script, *piaoyi* (飘逸) can be translated into “graceful”; while in the four-character expression like *lingdongpiaoyi* (灵动飘逸) it may be translated like “lively and graceful”, and “elegance, smoothness and vigor” in *jianyuanxiuyi* (尖圆秀逸)。

3.3. The Application of Cultural equivalence in Translating Calligraphy

Chinese calligraphy is taken as an art form rich in profound cultural heritage, for which the theory of cultural equivalence translation plays a crucial role in its translation and overseas dissemination. This theory of cultural equivalence translation advocates that in the process of translation, functional equivalence between the source language culture and the target language culture should be pursued to ensure accurate information transmission and effective cultural exchange.

The core of cultural equivalence translation theory is to identify and handle cultural differences between the source language and the target language, in order to achieve cultural functions and effects similar to those of the source language in the target language. In the context of translating calligraphy into English, this means that translators need to have a deep understanding of the artistic characteristics, cultural connotations, and functions of Chinese calligraphy in the Chinese context, while also mastering the expression habits and cultural background of the English language, in order to make appropriate cultural transformations during translating.

zhe chai gu (折钗股) is used to describe a brushwork technique. *chai* (钗) (hairpin) is originally ancient gold or silver ornaments on the women’s head. *chai* (钗) is very tough and hard, and lately *zhe chai gu* (折钗股) is used to describe the turning point of the strokes in calligraphy, Zhu[4] proposes that although the strokes are curved and twisted, there still present much force and flexibility.

When translating such terms, translators not only need to accurately convey the surface meaning of the text, but also need to use cultural equivalence translation strategies to reconstruct the cultural elements of "hairpin", a typical ancient Chinese female headwear, in English, so that English readers can feel similar artistic shock and cultural resonance as Chinese readers.

In addition, calligraphy terminology often carries rich cultural connotations and professional information, and the accuracy of its translation directly affects English readers’ understanding and cognition of Chinese calligraphy. Therefore, when translating these terms, translators need to fully consider their cultural connotations and specific meanings in calligraphy art, striving to find corresponding expressions in English that can accurately convey the original meaning while preserving cultural characteristics.

4. The Current Situation and Challenges of Overseas Dissemination of Chinese Calligraphy

4.1. History and Current Situation

Chinese calligraphy, as an important component of Chinese culture, has a profound and challenging history of overseas dissemination. From ancient times to modern times, the overseas dissemination of calligraphy art has accompanied the overall output of Chinese culture, presenting different historical characteristics. In ancient times, calligraphy was mainly introduced to neighboring countries through trade routes such as the Silk Road, in the form of inscriptions and calligraphy works, becoming a shared artistic treasure in the East Asian cultural circle. Since modern times, as early as the 2nd to 3rd century AD, Chinese calligraphy art has begun its overseas dissemination process, which especially deeply influenced neighboring countries with a long history of writing, Korea and Japan.

Presently, the process of globalization has accelerated the international dissemination of calligraphy art, which is no longer limited to specific regions or cultural circles. Moreover, the popularity of modern scientific and technological means such as the Internet, social media and AI has provided more opportunities to enable the overseas dissemination of contemporary calligraphy to reach unprecedented levels in breadth, depth, and speed.

4.2. Difficulties and Challenges Faced by Overseas Dissemination of Calligraphy

In the process of exploring the English translation and overseas dissemination of Chinese calligraphy, we inevitably encounter a series of difficulties and challenges. Song[5] views that infinite possibilities for artistic presentation and self-cultivation of Chinese characters may be the reason why Chinese calligraphy is hard for non-Chinese to understand.

Cultural differences have always been a gap in the overseas dissemination of Chinese calligraphy. Due to its profound connotation and rich symbolism, Chinese calligraphy is often closely linked to diverse cultural elements such as history, poetry, philosophy, which leads to significant difficulties for Westerners in understanding and appreciating Chinese calligraphy. For example, as we all know the ancient Chinese character scripts are mainly divided into five categories: *zhuan shu* (篆书, the seal script), *lishu* officialscript, *kai shu* (楷书, regular script), *xing shu* (行书, running script) and *cao shu* (草书, cursive script). In calligraphy works, the scripts each contain unique historical backgrounds and aesthetic concepts, and for overseas audiences it's difficult to deeply understand their spiritual connotations. In addition, in Chinese calligraphy the commonly used allusions, idioms, mottoes, etc. are also difficulties in cultural dissemination. Zhang [7] etc. propose that: such Chinese calligraphy terminologies need to be translated and interpreted in a flexible way considering target audience's different demands and varied contents transmitted

5. Optimization of Overseas Dissemination Strategies for Chinese Calligraphy

5.1. Improve the Quality and Accuracy of Calligraphy English Translation

From the perspective of intersemiotic translation, the optimization of strategies for the English translation and overseas dissemination of Chinese calligraphy is particularly important, for which improving the quality and accuracy of calligraphy English translation is undoubtedly the key. To achieve this goal, we need to comprehensively strengthen the professional training and cross-cultural literacy of translators from multiple dimensions, while constantly improving the English translation system of calligraphy terminology.

Calligraphy, as a unique component of traditional Chinese culture, has rich and profound connotations, which requires translators not only to have a solid language foundation but also to have a deep understanding and research of calligraphy art. To enhance the professional competence of translators in the field of calligraphy, specialized calligraphy translation courses should be offered by both calligraphers and translators. In addition, regular participation in calligraphy exhibitions, seminars, and other activities enable the translators to experience the charm of calligraphy in a practical environment, and thereby to understand and convey the essence of calligraphy works more accurately.

Secondly, enhancing the cross-cultural competence of translators is equally crucial. As calligraphy is a unique art form in China, it contains profound cultural heritage and unique aesthetic concepts behind it. Translating Chinese calligraphy into foreign language needs translators to not only focus on language conversion but also fully consider the impact of cultural differences on translation. To enhance the cross-cultural literacy, translators should explore cultural classics from both China and abroad extensively, and explore artistic concepts and aesthetic orientations from different cultural backgrounds. Moreover, in-depth exchanges and discussions with experts and scholars from different cultural backgrounds are essential to broaden cultural horizons and improve cross-cultural translation abilities.

In addition, as an important component of calligraphy art, the accuracy and standardization of the English translation of calligraphy terminology directly affect the understanding and appreciation of calligraphy works by overseas audiences. It's urgent to establish a scientific, systematic, and authoritative system for translating calligraphy terminology into English. Modern technological means such as establishing an English translation database for calligraphy terminology can also be utilized to facilitate translators' queries and usage.

5.2. Innovate the Overseas Dissemination of Chinese Calligraphy

As is mentioned, the rapid development of new media and internet technology has provided us with unprecedented opportunities. With the various modern communication tools, the dissemination of Chinese calligraphy is embracing new developing opportunities via multimedia forms like images, videos, interactive applications, etc.

In detail, media platforms such as social media and online forums are important windows for the overseas dissemination of Chinese calligraphy, through which, images and videos of calligraphy works accompanied by detailed English

explanations and background introductions could be regularly released to allow overseas audiences a more intuitive understanding of the artistic value and cultural connotations of calligraphy. At the same time, the interactive features of these platforms help collecting oversea feedback and opinions so timely as to optimize the dissemination of content more efficiently.

Internet technology also helps build online calligraphy exhibitions and communication platforms. Through technologies as virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR), an immersive calligraphy exhibition is realizable for overseas audiences, making who feel as if they are in a real calligraphy exhibition venue. In addition, it's simple and practicable for Chinese calligraphers to interact and communicate with overseas audiences in any form of lecture, seminar or workshop.

6. Conclusion

The current situation and challenges of the overseas dissemination of Chinese calligraphy coexist with both opportunities and challenges. This article delves into the translation strategies of Chinese calligraphy into English and explores new paths for the internationalization of Chinese calligraphy art. In addition, the article proposes strategies for optimizing the overseas dissemination of calligraphy from the perspective of intersemiotic translation, and points out that new media and internet technology combining traditional overseas calligraphy exhibitions and exchange activities is an effective means of innovating the ways and means of overseas

dissemination of Chinese calligraphy.

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