



The Moon Image in Chinese Classical Poetry Translation — from the Perspective of Cultural Translation Theory

Zikun Jiang

The University of Leeds, Woodhouse Lane, West Yorkshire, LS2 9JT, UK

Abstract: The image of “moon” has rich cultural connotations and special cultural significance in ancient Chinese poetry. The analysis of the handling of moon cultural factors, as well as the different translations of moon image when expressing the same emotion in the same poem, provides guidance and methods for translation practice through the development and application of cultural translation theory. Approaching and thinking from a cultural context can help translators better consider how to enhance the understanding of imagery in Chinese classical poetry among readers from English speaking countries, thereby boosting the dissemination and influence of Chinese classical poetry.

Keywords: cultural translation theory; image; moon; translation

1. Introduction

Moon, as a widely used image in classical Chinese poetry, carries people’s different emotions in different situations. By applying cultural translation theory and preserving the cultural characteristics of the original text, non-native Chinese speakers can better appreciate the beauty of the moon image and feel the charm of Chinese culture.

2. Introduction to Theory

2.1 Introduction of Cultural Translation Theory

Cultural translation theory focuses on cultural communication. Through translation activities, people can understand the unique cultures of other countries, ethnic groups, and regions, exchange information, promote comparison and research between different languages and cultures, and absorb or discard exotic cultures through translation to promote the development of their own culture. Cultural translation theory advocates that translators should respect the cultural background of the text during the translation process, and should not change or erase the cultural characteristics of the original. [1] Instead, they should strive to maintain cultural integrity as much as possible, so as to better convey diverse cultural connotations and characteristics.

Cultural translation can be understood from two aspects: first, the handling of cultural factors in the translation process; second, examining and interpreting translation from a broad cultural perspective. The English translation of classical Chinese poetry is not only a cross-cultural exchange, but also a consideration of how to better express the imagery of ancient poetry accurately and delicately, minimizing the improper understanding of ancient poetry caused by cultural differences. Supported by cultural translation theory, the English translation version can better reflect the charm of classical Chinese poetry, promote the dissemination and influence of excellent traditional Chinese culture.

2.2 Introduction of the Definition of Image in China and the West

In China, imagery is an abstract emotional image created through thought from objective things. It is the processing image of the cognitive object formed by the cognitive subject in the thinking space based on the surface information transmitted by the sensory source after being exposed to objective things, the physical memory traces and overall structural relationships left in the mind. The imagery endowed by traditional Chinese aesthetics is “scene fusion”, where “emotion” and “scenery” each other. [2] Influenced by classical Eastern poetry, modern Western literary school in the early 20th century emphasized the use of objective and accurate images to replace subjective emotional expression. Pound claimed that “image” is “a collection of rationality and sensibility expressed in an instant.”

3. The Image of Moon in Chinese Classical Poems

3.1 Colorful images of Moon in Chinese Classical Poems

“Moon” has colorful cultural connotations and special cultural significance in ancient Chinese poetry. This image has

been continuously enriched and excavated in the long history of Chinese culture, forming a unique cultural complex in the hearts of Chinese people. It is gentle and fine, representing beauty and elegance; It is noble and unsullied, embodying the lofty and virtuous character of literati; It is also a carrier of human yearning, expressing the nostalgia for friends, relatives and their homeland; It is eternal while everything changes off, showing the sadness of transient life, the loneliness and disappointment of career setbacks. Sorrow or longing, beauty or leisurely, solitude or pure, the tranquility and still of the moon, create an aesthetic atmosphere of delicate and quiet beauty, and trigger the ethereal sentiment of many literati.

3.2 The Different Connotations of Moon Image in Chinese Ancient Poems

In traditional Chinese culture, the image of the moon often serves as a carrier of people's thoughts and emotions, with rich connotations. The poet connects the moon with his inner affective world, and based on the author's different circumstances and moods, the joys and sorrows of life correspond to the wax and wane of the moon.

In his *Autumn Evening in the Mountains*, Wang Wei pours out "Among pine trees bright moonbeams peer; Over crystal stones flows water clear." The elegant and clear moon creates a serene atmosphere in the mountains and forests, making everything appear free, peaceful, fresh, and lively. It is filled with the poet's love for natural landscapes and the leisurely and open-minded feelings of seclusion. Du Fu recalls with emotion in *Thinking of My Brother on a Moonlit Night*, "Dew turns into frost since tonight; The moon viewed at home is more bright." The image of the moon contains infinite longing for their hometown and loved ones. The bright moon is as timeless as ever, a symbol of immutability and a witness to changes in the world. In Zhang Ruoxu's *The Moon over the River on a Spring Night*, "Many generations have come and passed away; From year to year the moons look alike, old and new." It presents the lament that the river and the moon are always there while life is easy to age. The depiction in Zhang Ji's *Mooring by Maple Bridge at Night* of "At moonset cry the crows, streaking the frosty sky; Dimlylit fishing boats' neath maples sadly lie" traces out the melancholy and lament enveloped by the desolate moonlight.

4. Different Translations of Moon Image in Chinese Classical Poems

4.1 The Handling of Moon Cultural Factors in the Translation Process

Cultural translation theory holds that translation should be based on culture as the unit of translation, rather than staying at traditional and simple vocabulary, phrases, sentences, or discourse. It is necessary to pursue cultural equivalence between the source language and the target language while respecting the cultural background of the original text.

In *A Tranquil Night*, which embodies Li Bai's strong homesickness, "明月" are used two times, but in English translation, different vocabularies are employed. In the 2006 version of Xu Yuanchong's translation, "床前明月光, 疑是地上霜" is translated as "Before my bed a pool of light — O can it be hoar-frost on the ground?" In the poem, autumn frost is compared to moonlight. Xu Yuanchong adds the color of frost, better showcasing the luminous and soft moonlight of autumn nights. The term "明月光" here is not directly translated as "bright moonlight". Instead, it echoes the question "疑是霜" in the following text, vividly portraying the cool and dreary atmosphere brought by the image of the moon on a clear and watery autumn night through the use of "a pool of light". "举头望明月, 低头思故乡" is translated as "Looking up, I find the moon bright; Bowing, in homesickness I'm drowned." Specific to the different situations and moods, different expressions as "moonglow", "moonlight", and "bright moon" are used in the English translation version which combines the classical Chinese meaning with the English language environment, beneficial for English readers to better appreciate the emotions conveyed by poetry.

4.2 Different Translations of the Moon Image in The Mid-autumn Festival Tune

According to cultural translation theory, translation focuses on cultural exchange, where culture comes first and information second. To achieve cultural functional equivalence,[3] translators need to exert their subjective initiative.

Su Shi mentioned the moon multiple times in *The Midautumn Festival Tune*. In the preface, Su Shi stated that the special day is the Mid-Autumn Festival, there being always a full moon representing happy reunion. It naturally reminds the poet of his family and friends. When faced with "明月几时有", Xu Yuanchong translates it as "How long will the full moon appear?" while Gong Jinghao expresses by "When shall we have a bright moon?" and Lin Yutang transformed it into "How rare the moon, so round and clear!" Different translators have chosen different translation to convey "明月", such as "full", "bright", "round and clear". However, no matter what kind of adjective is used to define the moon, it is based on the keynote of reunion and yearning, fully exerting subjective initiative, integrating their respective understandings into cultural exchanges. "婵娟" means pretty and graceful things in ancient poetry, each translator having unique version due to their comprehension. Xu Yuanchong succinctly translates in "Though miles apart, we'll share the beauty she displays", directly

interpreting “婵娟” as a symbol of beauty. “Then, however far apart we are, We’d still be sharing the same enchanting moonlight” by Gong Jinghao expresses expectations for a festive reunion by appreciating the moonlight together. Lin Yutang sublimates the wonderful wish of living for a long time mentioned in the previous line, hoping that “And our souls together heavenward fly”, borrowing the yearning and pursuit of heaven from most Westerners, conveying the Chinese people’s longing for family and friends, and their desire for reunion.

5. Conclusion

Overall, the development and application of cultural translation theory provide more guidance and methods for translation practice, which is of great reference value. Starting from the cultural context and thinking about it can help translators better consider how to enhance the understanding of the imagery in Chinese classical poetry among readers from English speaking countries. On the basis of respecting the original text, they should be more closely related to localized language expression, pay attention to cultural exchange and mutual learning, and thus promote Chinese classical poetry to better go abroad, enhance its dissemination and influence.

References

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