

Ancient Chinese Poetry Translation Strategies in Thai Cultural Landscape

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This paper investigates the translation strategies of ancient Chinese poetry within the contemporary Thai cultural landscape. Situated against the deepening of the Belt and Road Initiative and the building of the China-ASEAN community with a shared future, the dissemination of Chinese classical poetry in Thailand has become a vital channel for cultural exchange. Drawing on real translation examples drawn from political addresses, tourism sites, and educational materials, the study adopts a qualitative textual analysis to examine how translators bridge linguistic and cultural gaps. Five key strategies are identified and illustrated: substitution, paraphrase, omission, addition, and generalization. The findings demonstrate that the flexible application of these strategies can effectively enhance Thai audiences' comprehension while preserving the cultural connotations and rhetorical force of the original poetry. The paper further discusses future prospects, including professional translator training, interdisciplinary research, and the integration of artificial intelligence and virtual reality technologies into poetic translation. It argues that context-sensitive translation strategies are essential for promoting Chinese cultural heritage and fostering deeper Sino-Thai mutual understanding.

Keywords: ancient Chinese poetry, Thai translation, translation strategies, Thai cultural landscape, cross-cultural communication

China and Thailand are geographically close and culturally connected, with a history of exchanges dating back to the flourishing period of the Maritime Silk Road during the Han Dynasty. After more than a thousand years of commercial exchanges and cultural interactions, Thai society has formed a unique Chinese cultural circle, and the Chinese language and classical Chinese texts have a long tradition of acceptance among the Thai

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intellectual elite. Since the beginning of the 21st century, with the deepening promotion of the “Belt and Road” initiative and the construction of the China-ASEAN (China–Association of Southeast Asian Nations) community with a shared future, cooperation between China and Thailand in political, economic, educational, and cultural fields has become increasingly close. In this context, the translation, dissemination, and reception of ancient Chinese poetry, as a core carrier of Chinese culture, in Thailand have become an important window for examining the effectiveness of Chinese cultural overseas dissemination.

Research on the translation of ancient Chinese poetry abroad has long focused on Western languages such as English, French, and German as the main research subjects, forming a relatively mature theoretical discourse system. Western academic circles have accumulated rich academic resources on the translation and introduction of Chinese classical poetry. In contrast, research on the translation of ancient Chinese poetry into Southeast Asian languages remains relatively weak. Although Thai, as an important language with over 70 million speakers, has a long history of translation practice, systematic academic research is still insufficient, leaving a noticeable academic gap.

In the contemporary Thai cultural landscape, ancient Chinese poetry appears in diverse forms: Firstly, in the Thai Chinese education system, classical poetry is an important component of Chinese language courses, involving textbook compilation and teaching dissemination; secondly, in Thai tourism cultural landscapes (such as Chinatowns, historical sites, cultural theme parks), ancient poetry often appears in the form of inscriptions, couplets, and wall writings, constituting cross-cultural visual symbols; thirdly, in the China-related reports and official discourse of mainstream Thai media, Chinese leaders’ quotations of classical poetry have become a significant discursive phenomenon, and their Thai translation versions directly affect Thai audiences’ perception and understanding of Chinese culture.

Literature Review

The translation research of Chinese literary works into Thai can be roughly divided into two major areas. The first is the translation research of traditional Chinese literary works. Hu Wenbin (1991) pointed out that this translation activity can be traced back to 1802, when King Rama I ordered Bunnong, who was proficient in both Chinese and Thai, to preside over the Thai translation of “Romance of the Three Kingdoms”. During the reign of King Rama II, Chinese classical novels such as *Water Margin*, *Journey to the West*, *Jin Ping Mei*, *Strange Tales From a Chinese Studio*, *Chronicles of the Eastern Zhou Kingdoms*, *Eastern Han Popular Romance*, and *Investiture of the Gods* were successively translated into Thai. Li Xuezhi (2011) proposed that Princess Sirindhorn is the first representative figure to translate Chinese classical poetry into Thai, having published two Thai-translated poetry collections—*Glimmering Charm* and *Jade from the Tomb*. Zhang Bowen (2013) studied the purpose of translators in *The Classic of Filial Piety* and its translation strategies, as well as the comparative analysis between *Confucius’ Classic of Filial Piety* and *The Classic of Filial Piety*. Peng Shaoai (2013) studied the significance of *Mencius* and its overseas translation introduction, as well as the analysis of complete translation versions. The second area is the translation of the General Secretary’s speeches and discourses. Nie Xin (2019) conducted a comparative study of conceptual metaphors in *The Governance of China* and their Thai translation. Research on the translation of political discourse has mostly focused on languages such as English, French, and Spanish.

A review of the translation research of Chinese works into Thai reveals that both domestic and international scholars have focused on traditional Chinese literary works and the translation and analysis of the General Secretary's works. Additionally, there is increasing emphasis on translation methods, comparative analysis of conceptual metaphor translation, and diversified research methods. However, there has been no research on the analysis of the content of the Thai-translated versions of *The Governance of China*, the *Plain and Approachable* series, and *Xi Jinping's Use of Allusions* that have been published to date.

Overview of Ancient Chinese Poetry and the Thai Cultural Landscape

Cultural Connotations of Ancient Chinese Poetry

Imagery and artistic conception. Ancient Chinese poetry is renowned for its unique imagery and profound artistic conception. These elements are not only important carriers for poets' emotional expression but also bear rich cultural significance. The moon, as one of the most common images in ancient Chinese poetry, is often endowed with complex emotions such as longing, reunion, and loneliness. For example, in Li Bai's "Quiet Night Thoughts", the line "Before my bed, the moonlight is so bright, it seems like frost on the ground" creates a cold and lonely atmosphere through the image of the bright moon, while evoking a deep longing for hometown in wanderers (Li & Ling, 2023). Similarly, the willow tree, due to its graceful form and ease of growth, is often used to symbolize parting emotions and the tenacity of life. In Wang Wei's "Seeing Yuan Er off on His Mission to Anxi", he writes: "The morning rain in Weicheng moistens the light dust; the guesthouse is green, the willow color fresh". The imagery of the willow tree here not only enhances the melancholic atmosphere of parting but also conveys reluctance and blessings for the friend (Xu, 2019). Furthermore, ancient Chinese poetry creates unique artistic conceptions through the skillful combination and layering of imagery, allowing readers to feel infinite aesthetic space within limited words. The creation of this artistic conception relies not only on specific object descriptions but also on the integration of the poet's emotional expression and cultural background, thereby achieving the coexistence of emotion and reason, as well as the unity of style and meaning.

Allusions and cultural background. Allusions are an indispensable component of ancient Chinese poetry. Their sources are extensive, covering historical events, mythological legends, philosophical thoughts, and other fields, and they contain profound historical and cultural information. For example, the allusion "Zhuang Zhou Dreams of a Butterfly" comes from *Zhuangzi: Discussion on Making All Things Equal*, expressing the philosophical contemplation of life being like a dream and the indistinguishability between reality and illusion. In poetry, this allusion is often used to express the poet's reflections on the relationship between reality and illusion, such as in Li Shangyin's "The Inlaid Zither": "Zhuang Zhou dreamed of a butterfly, lost in morning dreams; the emperor Wang longed for spring, his heart entrusted to the cuckoo". By citing this allusion, the poet not only enriches the cultural connotation of the verse but also provokes readers to deeply contemplate the essence of life. Another example is the allusion "Nüwa Mends the Sky", which originates from ancient Chinese mythology and symbolizes the indomitable spirit and creativity of humanity in the face of disasters. The use of this allusion in poetry not only reflects the ancient people's awe of natural forces but also demonstrates the self-reliant and unyielding spirit of the Chinese nation. However, due to the strong cultural specificity of allusions, they can easily cause comprehension barriers in cross-cultural communication. Therefore, when translating ancient Chinese poetry into Thai, how to accurately convey the cultural meaning of allusions becomes a significant

challenge. Translators need to fully consider the cultural background of the target language readers and adopt appropriate translation strategies to avoid information distortion caused by cultural gaps.

Translation Strategies of Ancient Chinese Poetry Into Thai

The choice of translation strategies not only affects Thai audiences' understanding and acceptance of ancient Chinese poetry but also determines the effectiveness of Chinese cultural dissemination at a deeper level.

Substitution Translation

This involves replacing certain obscure or difficult-to-understand words, phrases, or sentences in ancient Chinese poetry with more accessible and comprehensible meanings. For example, at the 2015 China-Japan Friendly Exchange Conference, the phrase "Virtue is not left to stand alone; he who practices it will have neighbors" was used to vividly illustrate that the key to improving China-Japan relations lies in cultivating "virtue".

Translation: ผู้มีคุณธรรม ย่อมไม่ขาดเพื่อน

The original sentence comes from *The Analects: Liren*. "Virtue" refers to the common life and behavioral norms and standards of people. Therefore, Thai uses "คุณธรรม" to express the meaning of moral character and virtue, while replacing the Chinese "必" with "ย่อมไม่ขาด" (certainly not lacking), making the sentence structure progressively layered. Subsequently, it explains that the current "virtue" refers to adhering to the norms and standards of the international community (ประเทศหุ้นส่วนที่มีการไปมาหาสู่ มีความสัมพันธ์ที่ใกล้ชิด และช่วยเหลือซึ่งกันและกันอยู่เสมอ), and "neighbors" refers to partner countries with frequent exchanges, harmonious relationships, and mutual support (การให้ความเคารพในกฎกติการะหว่างประเทศที่มาตรฐาน). This enhances readers' understanding of "Virtue is not left to stand alone; he who practices it will have neighbors".

Paraphrase Translation

This involves adding "explanations" or "word groupings" to certain words, phrases, or sentences to further clarify the ancient Chinese policies or concepts involved in the poetry. For example, at the opening ceremony of the 2016 G20 Business Summit, the historical allusion "lighten customs and ease roads, facilitate commerce and relax clothing" was used to vividly and forcefully call on countries to avoid turning back the wheel of history.

Translation: มาตรการลดกำแพงภาษี ส่งเสริมการค้าทางการเกษตร

The original sentence comes from *Discourses of the States: Jin Yu*. "Lighten customs and ease roads" in ancient Chinese refers to reducing customs taxes and improving roads. If translated word-for-word into Thai, it could be misunderstood as "การปิดประตูเบา ๆ จะทำให้ง่ายต่อการเดินบนถนน" (closing the door lightly makes it easier to walk on the road), which might lead readers to mistake it for an idiom describing walking actions. Therefore, it is replaced with "มาตรการลดกำแพงภาษี" (measures to reduce tariff barriers). "Facilitate commerce and relax clothing" in ancient Chinese refers to relaxing agricultural policies, reducing farmers' burdens, and not interfering with farming seasons. If translated word-for-word, it could be misunderstood as "หมุนเวียนการค้าและเสื้อผ้าขนาดใหญ่" (circulating commerce and large clothing), which might lead readers to mistake it for an idiom describing clothing. Therefore, it is replaced with "ส่งเสริมการค้าทางการเกษตร" (promoting agricultural trade). This makes it easier for readers to understand the policies introduced by feudal states during the Spring and Autumn period to develop agriculture and commerce.

Omission Translation

Given the profoundness of Chinese culture and readers' limited understanding of Chinese culture, some non-key words, phrases, or sentences that are difficult to understand are intentionally deleted to ensure readers can comprehend the entire sentence. For example, at the 60th Anniversary Commemoration of the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, the phrase “All things are produced and develop without injuring one another; the ways run parallel without interfering with one another” was used to describe how equality and inclusiveness are inherent in global governance.

Translation: สรรพสิ่งล้วนอยู่ร่วมกันโดยไม่เบียดเบียน วิถีธรรมอยู่คู่กันโดยไม่เป็นปฏิกิริยา

The original sentence comes from *The Book of Rites: The Doctrine of the Mean*, which means “a vivid portrayal of biodiversity in nature, where celestial bodies such as the sun and moon have their own orbits and can run simultaneously without interfering with each other”. The Thai version directly omits “diversity”, translating it as “สรรพสิ่งล้วน” (all things). It also omits “celestial bodies such as the sun and moon”, translating it as “วิถีธรรม” (the way of virtue). Deleting complex metaphorical parts makes it easier for readers to understand the laws of all things and the meaning of peace in the new era.

Addition Translation

Ancient Chinese poetry often has a concise and compact structure, and sentences often lack obvious logical connectives such as “if”, “suppose”, “assuming”, etc. Therefore, in Thai translation, more attention should be paid to the addition of logical words. For example, in a speech at the Indian World Affairs Council, the phrase “If you want to establish yourself, establish others; if you want to succeed, help others succeed” was used to express China's expectation to join hands with India to achieve national rejuvenation.

Translation: หากจะสร้างตัวต้องส่งเสริมผู้อื่น หากต้องการความสำเร็จต้องสนับสนุนผู้อื่น

The original sentence comes from *The Analects: Yong Ye*, meaning “a person of virtue, if he wants to stand firm (establish himself), should also help others stand firm; if he wants to succeed (achieve his goals), should also help others succeed”. “Establish others” is based on the premise of wanting to establish oneself, and “help others succeed” is based on wanting to achieve one's own goals. In the Thai translation, “หาก” (if) is added, meaning “if... must...” This helps readers better understand the logical relationship between each line of the poem.

Generalization Translation

This uses general words, phrases, or sentences to summarize specific objects in ancient Chinese poetry. For example, at the opening ceremony of the 2013 Russia-China Tourism Year, the phrase “Being kind to neighbors and treating them with benevolence are a treasure of the state” was used to describe the need to promote comprehensive, high-level, and strong China-Russia relations.

Translation: การมีมิตรที่ดี เป็นสมบัติอันล้ำค่าของบ้านเมือง

The original sentence comes from the Confucian classic *Zuo Zhuan*, meaning “pursuing benevolence and maintaining friendly relations with neighboring countries are a treasure for establishing a state”. In Thai translation, “pursuing benevolence” and “maintaining friendly relations with neighboring countries” are generalized as “มีมิตรที่ดี” (having good friends).

Future Prospects for the Translation of Ancient Chinese Poetry in the Thai Cultural Landscape

The quality and effectiveness of translating ancient Chinese poetry in the Thai cultural landscape largely depend on the capabilities and expertise of professional translators. Therefore, cultivating professionals who are proficient in both Chinese and Thai language and culture and familiar with poetry translation theories and techniques is an important guarantee for promoting Sino-Thai cultural exchanges. Such talents not only need a solid language foundation but also a deep understanding of the cultural connotations and aesthetic characteristics of ancient Chinese poetry, as well as the cultural background of Thailand. To achieve this goal, it is recommended to start from higher education by offering specialized courses in Chinese-Thai poetry translation, combined with practical case teaching. Additionally, translation practitioners should be encouraged to participate in Sino-Thai cultural exchange projects to enhance their translation skills through practical experience. At the same time, cooperation between academia and industry should be strengthened to provide more learning and exchange platforms for translation talents, thereby promoting the organic integration of translation theory and practice.

The research on the translation of ancient Chinese poetry in the Thai cultural landscape has distinct interdisciplinary characteristics, involving fields such as cultural studies, linguistics, and communication studies. Advocating interdisciplinary research can not only expand research perspectives but also provide new ideas and methods for solving complex translation problems. For example, from a cultural studies perspective, an in-depth analysis can be conducted on the impact of cultural differences between China and Thailand on poetry translation. From a linguistic perspective, translation strategies can be optimized by comparing the syntactic structures and expressions of Chinese and Thai languages. From a communication studies perspective, ways to enhance the dissemination effectiveness of poetry translation in the Thai cultural landscape using modern communication media can be explored. Furthermore, interdisciplinary research helps build a more systematic translation theoretical framework, providing a scientific basis for future poetry translation practices.

With the rapid development of modern technologies such as artificial intelligence translation and virtual reality, their application potential in poetry translation and cultural dissemination is increasingly evident. Artificial intelligence translation technology can quickly generate high-quality initial translations through big data analysis and deep learning algorithms, thereby significantly improving translation efficiency. However, since poetry translation involves rich cultural connotations and artistic expression techniques, relying solely on artificial intelligence still struggles to meet the demands of high-quality translation. Therefore, it is recommended to combine artificial intelligence translation with manual proofreading and polishing to ensure the accuracy and artistry of the translation. On the other hand, the application of virtual reality technology provides new possibilities for the dissemination of poetry culture. For example, in the Thai cultural landscape, virtual reality technology can recreate the scenes and artistic conceptions in ancient Chinese poetry, allowing Thai audiences to more intuitively experience the charm of poetry. This technological assistance not only enhances the effectiveness of cultural dissemination but also stimulates audiences' interest in and identification with Chinese culture, injecting new vitality into Sino-Thai cultural exchanges.

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