



Appreciation of Poetry of Tang Dynasty in English Classes

—Taking Li Bai's *Changganxing* as an Example

Xiaoli Zhang, Jin Luo

School of Foreign Studies, Yangtze University, Jingzhou, China

Email: 35637952@qq.com

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Abstract

Poetry of Tang Dynasty is a pearl in world literature. The English translation of poetry of Tang Dynasty can help more people know about Chinese history, language and culture. As bilingual learners, Chinese students are encouraged to know more aspects of the culture to achieve a smooth cross-cultural communication. Taking the classic poem of Tang Dynasty, Li Bai's *Changganxing*, and its English translations as examples, this paper tries to prove the importance of literature in cross-cultural communication in language classrooms. At the same time, the paper also advocates the integration of poetry of Tang Dynasty in English classes and proposes some teaching strategies in order to improve the core literacy and cross-cultural communication ability of Chinese students.

Subject Areas

Culture, Linguistics, Literature

Keywords

Poetry of the Tang Dynasty, Cross-Cultural Communication, Teaching Strategies

1. Introduction

Cross-cultural communication is reflected not only in economic or political fields but also in education, especially in bilingual classrooms. The essence of spreading Chinese culture in English is a kind of cross-cultural communication activity. Due to the differences in the cultural backgrounds of the two parties, there is a common phenomenon of value depletion of information expression in cross-cultural

communication, that is, cultural discount [1]. Therefore, the design of Chinese culture content in teaching materials should not only consider what we want to disseminate and in what way, but also consider the audience's cultural background and existing cognition of Chinese culture. Poetry of Tang Dynasty is a precious treasure of Chinese culture. With its unique artistic charm and rich cultural connotation, it occupies an important position in the history of world literature. However, how to better impart these precious traditional knowledge to the new generation of English learners, is of peculiar importance.

This paper makes a preliminary discussion on the introduction of English translation of Poetry of Tang Dynasty. Obviously, the translation of these poems as a cross-cultural communication is not only a pure transformation between languages, but a communication and integration between different cultures. Through teaching Poetry of Tang Dynasty in English classes, teachers should pay attention not only to the translation techniques of language, but also to the transmission and understanding of the culture. Through the teaching of the poetry of Tang Dynasty, Chinese learners will further understand the essence of Chinese culture, improve their cultural self-confidence, enhance their cross-cultural communication ability, and build their cultural awareness.

2. Literature Review on the Translation and Cultural Exchange of Poetry of Tang Dynasty

The earliest translation of poetry of Tang Dynasty occurred in the 17th century in China, when European missionaries translated some poems into Latin and spread them to Europe. After the 18th century, cultural exchanges between China and the West became increasingly frequent, and poetries of Tang Dynasty were translated into English, French and German. Since the 20th century, the translation of Poetry of Tang Dynasty has ushered in a period of vigorous development. Among all these Sinologists, the most representative ones include Joseph Edkins, Sir John Francis Davis, Edward Harper Parke, Herbert Allen Giles and William John Bainbrigge Fletcher. *Gems of Chinese Verse* by Fletcher was the first cohort study of poetry of Tang Dynasty [2]. In 1898, Herbert Allen Giles selected and translated 105 Chinese Poetry of Tang Dynasty in *Chinese Poetry in English Verse*. He included the works of poets such as Li Bai, Du Fu, Bai Juyi, Wang Wei, Li Shangyin and Du Mu. In 1915, the representative characters of freestyle (Ezra Pound) were launched *Cathay*, including 14 Poetry of Tang Dynasty such as Li Bai's *Song Bie*. Their efforts not only show respect and love for the tradition of Chinese classical poetry, but also promote the process of poetry of Tang Dynasty, an important part of Chinese classical literature, entering the Western cultural horizon from different sides and at different levels, so that cultural explorers in the English-speaking world can get a glimpse of the peak of the Eastern poetry kingdom.

Modern Chinese scholars gave a contribution to the study of the translation of poetry of Tang Dynasty. The most representative one is Xu Yuanchong, who raised the translation of rhythmic style to the height of "three beauties" (sound,

form and meaning) [3]. In *A Study on the Translation of Classic Poetry of Tang Dynasty into English*, Wang Feng (2015) took the translation of classic Poetry of Tang Dynasty into English as the research object, comparing Eastern and Western translation theories and exploring the basic techniques in the translation of Poetry of Tang Dynasty into English, such as resemblance in form and resemblance in spirit, literal translation and free translation, and rhythmic style and freestyle [4].

In teaching poetry of Tang Dynasty, Wang Minling and Zeng Fengying (2015) believe that Tang and Song poetry, as the treasures of Chinese classical literature, is an important component of Chinese culture going abroad [5]. Wu Yuli (2019) believes that the translation of Tang poetry into English is not only a kind of language conversion, but a kind of cultural exchange [6]. It is believed that in the process of translation, translators should fully understand the cultural implications of poetry and adopt appropriate translation strategies in order to ensure the cultural characteristics of the original text and be accepted by the target language readers. This requires translators to have the ability of cross-cultural communication and to overcome the barriers between different cultures to carry out effective cultural communication. Zhang Taoyong and Ma Yilin (2022), in the background of “culture going global”, how to tell “Chinese stories” and spread “Chinese voices” well has become an important mission in the field of cross-cultural communication [7]. In order to give English readers a deeper appreciation of the charm of classic Chinese poetry, the translators first need to have a deep understanding of the essential differences in expressions between Chinese and English, as well as the differences in ways of thinking caused by cultural awareness. After reading many of Xu Yuanchong’s translation work, Wu Huifang (2022) holds that he respects the language norms of the original work and takes into account the culture of the target language and the acceptability of the target language readers, showing a high degree of cultural consciousness [8].

Through the previous study, the necessity of integrating Chinese traditional culture into English classes is obvious. The teacher can use poetry of Tang Dynasty as a useful teaching resource to give English learners more chances to taste the differences in languages in conveying the meanings and cultures in two languages. This study employs a qualitative research method and literature research method, synthesizing existing research on the translation and teaching of Poetry of Tang Dynasty in English classes for the EFLs in China. Through adopting a case study method, the authors are trying to compare the different translation versions in conveying the images and meaning in the original verse. Taking one classic Poetry of Tang Dynasty as an example, there are altogether three translation versions provided. While comparing their differences in delivering the original poem’s meaning, image and rhyme, the readers can also feel the subjectivity of the translators when they are conducting the translation, especially the awareness of the cultural differences in conveying the original meaning in the source language.

3. Different English Versions of *Changganxing*

In this part, several translation versions of Li Bai’s classic poetry *Changganxing* will

be introduced. The poetry is a love narrative poem, which reflects the life and emotions of ancient merchant wives by means of monologue. The following is the original poetry in Chinese.

长干行

[唐] 李白

妾发初覆额，折花门前剧。
郎骑竹马来，绕床弄青梅。
同居长千里，两小无嫌猜，
十四为君妇，羞颜未尝开。
低头向暗壁，千唤不一回。
十五始展眉，愿同尘与灰。
常存抱柱信，岂上望夫台。
十六君远行，瞿塘滟滪堆。
五月不可触，猿声天上哀。
门前迟行迹，一一生绿苔。
苔深不能扫，落叶秋风早。
八月蝴蝶黄，双飞西园草。
感此伤妾心，坐愁红颜老。
早晚下三巴，预将书报家。
相迎不道远，直至长风沙。 [9]

The poem adopts a self-narrative tone of a boatwoman who lives in Changanli, recounting her love from childhood sweethearts to faraway love, pouring out her yearning for her distant husband, and successfully shaping a typical image of a young woman in ancient China who is rich in feelings and deeply moving. The poet uses vivid images to make typical generalizations, and opens a vivid picture to us. The first six sentences, are like a group of folk children playing amorous picture. The following eight sentences after “to be your wife at fourteen” vividly and delicately depict the life of the young bride after her marriage through psychological description. The following eight sentences, through the solar term changes and the description of different scenery, the image of a young woman who misses her husband on a long trip, is vividly depicted, while the last two sentences reflect the unique romantic color of the poet. The description of many details in the poem is quite outstanding and full of artistic effect, such as “my hair first overcast forehead” following a few sentences, describing the innocent game for the young boy and girl. “Childhood sweethearts” became an idiom that is still used today in China. Another example is “bow to the dark wall, a thousand times not once”, writing the shyness of a woman when she was first married. The poet pays attention to the changes in women’s mental states in different stages but does not simply state it. Again, lines like “late in front of the door, a life of green moss”, “butterfly yellow in August, double fly west garden grass”, etc., through the specific scene description, the poet shows the deep emotional activities of the inner world of the merchant’s wife. The following are some different English versions.

3.1. The River-Merchants Wife: A Letter

—Translated by Ezra Pound

While my hair was still cut straight across my forehead,

I played about the front gate, pulling flowers.

You came by on bamboo stilts, playing horse,

You walked about my seat, playing with blue plums.

And we went on living in the village of Chokan:

Two small people, without dislike or suspicion.

At fourteen I married My Lord you.

I never laughed, being bashful.

Lowering my head, I looked at the wall.

Called to, a thousand times, I never looked back.

At fifteen I stopped scowling,

I desired my dust to be mingled with yours.

Forever and forever and forever.

Why should I climb the look out?

At sixteen you departed,

You went into far Ku-to-en, by the river of swirling eddies,

And you have been gone five months.

The monkeys make sorrowful noise overhead.

You dragged your feet when you went out.

By the gate now, the moss is grown, the different mosses,

Too deep to clear them away!

The leaves fall early this autumn, in wind.

The paired butterflies are already yellow with August.

Over the grass in the West garden;

They hurt me. I grow older.

If you are coming down through the narrows of the river Kiang,

Please let me know beforehand,

And I will come out to meet you.

As far as Cho-fu-Sa. [10]

Li Bai's *Changganxing* was one of ancient Chinese poems that Pound translated from the posthumous manuscripts of the Oriental poet Fenolosa. Since Pound does not know Chinese, his translation is not so accurate, but it is very poetic, or maybe a re-creation according to the spirit of the original poem. Readers should not be too concerned with the accuracy of Pound's translation, but should acknowledge his contribution to the dissemination of Chinese culture.

3.2. A soldier's Wife to Her Husband

—Translated by W. A. P. Martin

It was many a year ago.
How I recall the day!
When you, my own true love.
Came first with me to play.
You rode a bamboo horse.
And deemed yourself a knight.
With paper helm and shield.
And wooden sword, bedight.
Thus we together grew,
And we together played—
Yourself a giddy boy,
And I a thoughtless maid.
At fourteen I was wed;
And if one called my name,
As quick as lightning flash,
The crimson blushes came.
It was not till we had passed.
A year of married life.
My heart was knit to yours.
In joy to be your Wife.
Another year, alas!
And you had joined your chief;
While I was left at home,
In solitary grief.

When victory crows your arms,
 And I your triumph learn,
 What bliss for me to fly.
 To welcome your return. [11]

Reading this English verse, the Chinese students may intend to make a second translation when reading the English lines. From the title, students may give their surprise, because the title “the soldier’s wife” is not accurate to the original meaning. This poem is a monologue from a wife of a merchant instead of a soldier. Readers may also find that this version is very oral and readable, just like a modern poetry, and it will make readers forget he is reading an ancient Chinese poem. So, the taste of the ancient China’s scenery and history will be lost.

3.3. Ballad of a Trader’s Wife

—Translated by Xu Yuanchong

My forehead barely covered by my hair,
 Outdoors I pluck’d and played with flowers fair.
 On hobby horse you came upon the scene;
 Around the well we played with mimes still green.
 We lived, close neighbors on Riverside Lane,
 Carefree and innocent, we children twain.
 At fourteen years when I became your bride,
 I’d often turn my bashful face aside.
 Hanging my head, I’d look on the dark Wall;
 I would not answer your call upon call.
 I was fifteen when I composed my brows;
 To mix my dust with yours were my dear vows.
 Rather than break faith, you declared you’d die.
 Who knew I’d live alone in tower high?
 I was sixteen when you went far away,
 Passing Three Gorges studded with rocks grey,
 Where ships were wrecked when spring flood ran high.
 Where gibbons’ wails seemed coming from the sky.
 Green moss now overgrows before our door;
 Your footprints, hidden, can be seen no more.

Moss can't be swept away, so thick it grows,
 And leaves fall early when the west wind blows.
 In yellow autumn butterflies would pass.
 Two by two in west garden o'er the grass.
 This sight would break my heart and I'm afraid,
 Sitting alone, my rosy cheeks would fade.
 O when are you to leave the western land?
 Do not forget to tell me beforehand!
 I'll walk to meet you and not call it far.
 E'en to go to Long Wild Sands where you are. [12]

Using iambic pentameter and Heroic couplet, Xu's translation is vivid, remaining the form, rhyme and meaning of the original poem to a great extent. Although there are diverse versions of the translation, the ultimate goal of translation is to achieve a cultural exchange. Through appreciating the different versions, English readers can also establish their own standards of preference, and that is the real and ultimate goal of cultural communication. Introducing Chinese poetry into English classes is of great importance in transmitting "something lost in translation".

4. Teaching Strategies of Poetry of Tang Dynasty in English Classes

4.1. Adapting to Different Levels of Students

From the perspective of cross-cultural communication, the key to optimize the teaching of Poetry of Tang Dynasty translation is to adjust teaching strategies according to the differences of students. The author should have an overall understanding of the students' English level, cultural background, and their understanding level of poetry. On this basis, the students can be divided into groups, and each group is taught individually. For students with poor English foundation, emphasis should be placed on strengthening language foundation such as words and grammar, and gradually making them understand and understand the poetry of Tang Dynasty. In the process of learning, we should pay attention to language teaching for students with different cultural backgrounds, so that they can better understand the profound cultural connotation contained in poetry. At the same time, according to students' hobbies and expertise, various forms of learning resources and activities are provided for them, such as reciting and translating exercises, so as to improve their learning enthusiasm.

4.2. Adopting Multimedia and Internet Resources

In order to further improve the teaching effect of English poetry, multimedia,

Internet and other technical means can be used as effective aids in class. Using video, sound, pictures and other multimedia means, the artistic conception and human environment of the poetry are vividly presented to the readers, so that they can feel the beauty of the poetry more directly. Using sound and video to help students better understand the rhythm and rhythm of poetry. At the same time, students are encouraged to take full advantages of online learning platforms and electronic libraries to get abundant learning resources. All the teaching materials will provide students with an autonomous and extended learning environment without time and space limitations. In addition, online platforms, such as applets, blogs, can also be used to allow students to communicate and discuss on the network, share their learning experiences and works, and enhance the communication and interaction between different cultures.

4.3. Creating Cross-Cultural Communication Scenes

English classroom is a comprehensive platform. Through situational simulation, students are guided into various situations to experience English translation and communication situations so that the participants can experience the differences and collisions of various cultures and learn how to conduct cross-cultural communication. Through various cultural and language drill activities such as translation contests and games, students can gain practical experience and improve their ability of cross-cultural communication. Students can not only exercise their practical language skills, but also broaden their horizons and enhance their cross-cultural communication skills. In addition, foreign English teachers can be invited to participate in classroom teaching. By creating a different cultural communication situation, students can better understand the language of poetry, the beauty of the translation of poetry, and the cultures conveyed in the source language and the collision of cultures in two languages.

5. Discussion

Taking the classic Chinese poetry of Tang Dynasty as an example, this paper studies the application of English translation from the perspective of cross-cultural communication and gives some suggestions on the teaching of Tang poetries to English learners in China. The introduction of English translation of poems of Tang Dynasty in English teaching is not only conducive to the cultivation of students' English skills, but also conducive to strengthening the understanding and respect of Chinese cultures. Through the appreciation and translation of the poems, students can taste the profound ancient domestic culture, expand their English literacy, and enhance their cross-cultural communication ability. According to the different characteristics of students, the corresponding teaching strategies can better adapt to the needs of students and improve the teaching quality. The use of multimedia and network resources to enrich the teaching contents can make students have a strong interest in the course, thus improving the teaching effect. The cross-cultural communication scenes can enhance students' participation and enhance the learning experience.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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