

A Study on the Translation of Ceramic Poems and the Dissemination of China's National Image

Ren Xiajing^{1,a}, Liu Qinqing^{1,b}, Shi Maqingsyang^{1,c}, Wang Lun^{1,d,*}

¹*Jingdezhen Ceramic University, Jingdezhen, Jiangxi, China*

^a*3068782107@qq.com*, ^b*2186933955@qq.com*, ^c*1591683354@qq.com*, ^d*wanglun@jcu.edu.cn*

**Corresponding author*

Keywords: Ceramic Poems; National Image; Cross-Cultural Communication; Translation Strategies; Cultural Dissemination

Abstract: Against the backdrop of globalization, ceramic poems, as unique texts that integrate ceramics and poetry, serve as a crucial carrier for conveying the national image, whose cross-cultural dissemination relies heavily on translation. However, existing studies are limited to single dimensions and fail to connect with the construction of the national image. By adopting methods such as text analysis and case studies, this paper first clarifies the core connections between the translation of ceramic poems and the dissemination of the national image: translation acts as a transmission bridge, strategies guide image construction, and quality determines the accuracy of dissemination. Then, from the five dimensions of history, culture, society, technology, and system, and combined with specific cases and research by Chinese and foreign scholars, it verifies the dissemination value of ceramic poem translation. Theoretically, this study breaks through existing limitations, establishes a logical framework of “translation—cultural transmission—national image”, and fills gaps in relevant research. Practically, it sorts out suitable translation strategies and practical suggestions to provide support for translators and communication institutions, helping to upgrade the national image from “symbolic dissemination” to “value recognition”, and puts forward prospects for future research directions.

1. Introduction

1.1 Research Background

In the context of globalization, China needs to convey its national image through diverse carriers. Ceramic poems, which integrate ceramics and poetry, are unique cultural texts. The dissemination of national image depends on translation, yet existing studies focus solely on either the literary or craft dimension of poem translation, ignoring the cultural communication function and thus failing to contribute to the construction of the national image.

1.2 Research Significance

1.2.1 Theoretical Significance

This study fills the gap in the research on the translation of ceramic poems from the perspective of cultural communication, enriches the theories of Chinese cultural translation, and provides references for similar studies.

1.2.2 Practical Significance

The study sorts out the cultural connotations and translation strategies, offers guidance to translators and inspiration to communication institutions, and promotes the upgrading of the national image from “symbolic dissemination” to “value recognition”.

1.3 Research Status and Gaps

Domestic and foreign studies focus respectively on the literature and craftsmanship of ceramic poems, or on the archaeology and art history of ceramic artifacts. Research on translation is superficial and not linked to the national image. The core gap lies in the failure to establish the logic of “translation—cultural transmission—national image” and to explore the impact of translation on the cognitive understanding of international audiences.

1.4 Research Ideas and Methods

The research idea and flowing chart of the study is “defining the scope and connotation → analyzing problems in translated versions → proposing and verifying appropriate strategies”. Methods such as text analysis, case studies, and audience surveys are adopted to ensure scientificity and practicality of the research.

2. Core Connections between the Translation of Ceramic Poems and the Dissemination of China’s National Image

2.1 Translation as a Transmission Bridge for Ceramic Poems to Bear the National Image

Translation is not merely a simple language conversion, but a “meaning transmission medium” for the national image in a cross-cultural context. As Wang Changli stated, “In-depth research on the differences between English and Chinese linguistic features and corresponding translation strategies is of great theoretical and practical significance for improving translation quality, promoting cultural exchanges between China and foreign countries, and serving China’s opening-up strategy.”[1] As texts that integrate the aesthetics of artifacts and literary artistic conception, the translation of ceramic poems needs to convey both the “ceramic craftsmanship” and “poetic aesthetics”—the former is associated with China’s industrial image of “exquisite craftsmanship”, while the latter carries the cultural image of “unique aesthetics”. Through translation, these two aspects together form a concrete perception of China among overseas audiences, serving as a hidden carrier for the dissemination of the national image.

2.2 Translation Strategies Guide the Construction of the National Image in Different Dimensions

Differences in translation strategies directly lead to different effects in the dissemination of the

national image. “The foreignization strategy helps preserve the characteristics of Chinese culture and promotes the development of cultural diversity; the domestication strategy enhances the readability of the translated text, thereby expanding the dissemination scope of Chinese classical literary works.”[2] In the translation of ceramic poems, the foreignization strategy (e.g., translating “Yaobian” as “Yaobian [kiln transformation]”) can preserve the uniqueness of Chinese ceramic culture and strengthen the image of “distinctive culture and profound heritage”; the domestication strategy (e.g., translating “Qianfengcuise” as “emerald green of mountains”) can lower the understanding threshold and shape the image of “openness, inclusiveness, and approachability”. These two strategies need to be flexibly adapted according to the communication objectives.

2.3 Translation Quality Determines the Accuracy of National Image Dissemination

The quality of translation directly affects the accuracy of national image dissemination, and avoiding cultural misinterpretation is a core prerequisite. A translation quality evaluation system should, on the basis of striving to help evaluators reach objective conclusions, not only highlight its own distinctive system characteristics but also coordinate its relationships with other systems (such as translation criticism and translation quality assurance) and the system environment.[3] If the concept of “the unity of man and nature” in ceramic poems is mistranslated as “human-nature separation”, it will distort China’s cultural image of “respecting nature”; while an accurate translation (e.g., “harmony between human and nature”) combined with annotations can help overseas audiences understand the core of “the coexistence of artifacts and nature” in ceramic poems, contributing to the dissemination of the national image of “respecting nature and pursuing harmony”.

3. The Translation of Ceramic Poems and the Dissemination of China’s National Image

3.1 The Translation of China’s History in Ceramic Poems and the Dissemination of the National Image

Ceramic poems are like vivid historical paintings, containing China’s profound historical heritage. Accurate translation can enable the world to see the mysterious charm of China’s history and optimize China’s international historical and cultural image. “There have been many successful practices of Chinese cultural translation in different fields. For example, the multilingual versions of Mo Yan’s *Red Sorghum* have aroused the interest of international readers with their vivid language and distinctive cultural characteristics.”[4]

From a temporal perspective, ceramic poems record the development process of ceramics from its origin, reflecting the social styles and characteristics of different periods in China: although there are few poems related to pottery in primitive society, scattered lines can still show the exploration of clay and fire at that time, representing the germination of historical culture; the emergence of primitive porcelain in the Shang and Zhou dynasties can be traced in some artifact-related poems. Although the craftsmanship was immature, it demonstrated the creativity of the ancestors and laid the foundation for the development of ceramics in later generations. Ding Yi mentioned in *History of the Overseas Spread of Chinese Ceramics* that China is the first country in the world to invent high-temperature glazed porcelain. As one of the precious historical heritages of the Chinese nation, ceramics also played a significant role in East-West trade.[5] When translating poems describing the “Five Famous Kilns” of the Song Dynasty, combining them with the economic background of the “Tea-Horse Trade” in the Song Dynasty can help Western readers more intuitively understand the role of Chinese ceramics in promoting material exchanges across the Eurasian continent in ancient times, breaking the stereotype of “China’s historical isolation”. The Tang and Song

dynasties were the golden age of Chinese ceramics and poetry; their integration gave birth to a large number of excellent ceramic poems. Lu Guimeng's "Secret Color of Yue Ware" in the Tang Dynasty describes the firing process and color of Yue kiln's secret-color porcelain. When translating this poem, annotations on the status, development context of Yue kiln, and the craftsmanship of secret-color porcelain are necessary. Mei Yaochen's "The Potter" in the Song Dynasty reflects the scale of ceramic production and the hardships of potters. Combining it with the economy and ceramic industry of the Song Dynasty can highlight its social and economic status. During the Yuan, Ming, and Qing dynasties, ceramic craftsmanship underwent innovations, with the emergence of blue-and-white porcelain, famille rose porcelain, etc. The technology of blue-and-white porcelain matured in the Yuan Dynasty, and Zheng He's voyages to the Western Seas in the Ming Dynasty promoted its overseas spread, with relevant poems recording the attitude of openness and exchange; ceramic craftsmanship reached its peak in the Qing Dynasty, and Emperor Qianlong wrote more than 200 ceramic poems that vividly describe famous porcelains. Translating these poems can help foreign readers appreciate the royal preference and exquisite craftsmanship, and feel the historical and cultural accumulation and inheritance of Chinese ceramics.

3.2 The Translation of Chinese Culture in Ceramic Poems and the Dissemination of the National Image

Ceramic poems contain rich Chinese culture and serve as a special carrier for spreading Chinese culture. Their translation is of great significance for showcasing China's image as a cultural power to the world. The "aesthetic logic" of Chinese culture differs from that of the West, emphasizing "implied artistic conception and blank space" rather than "concrete description". Li Mei mentioned that "on the one hand, as researchers in the field of comparative literature, we need to fully appreciate the national, cultural, and historical characteristics of our own country; on the other hand, we need to fully understand all relevant aspects of foreign cultures in order to gain meaningful insights and understanding: this is a dilemma that must be faced in the long term in the study of Eastern and Western literature." [6]

Traditional Chinese cultural thoughts are deeply integrated into ceramic poems. The Confucian values of "benevolence", "propriety", and "striving for perfection" are reflected in the strict procedures and pursuit of perfection in ceramic production. When translating relevant poems, it is necessary to explore the cultural connotations to help foreign readers understand Confucianism and the moral and humanistic spirit of Chinese culture. The Taoist proposition of "following the laws of nature" is manifested in the praise of the natural colors and simple shapes of porcelain. During translation, this aesthetic concept should be conveyed to enable foreign readers to appreciate the concept of the coexistence of Chinese culture and nature. "In the practice of translating ceramic poems, translators first ensure that the translated text is faithful to the original, accurately conveys the semantic meaning of the original, and achieves the same artistic effect of meaning as the source language. Secondly, they reproduce the rhythmic form of the poem to the greatest extent, achieving the beauty of form and even the beauty of sound." [7]

Ceramic poems also carry China's unique aesthetic concepts, such as the pursuit of the beauty of artistic conception. Chinese ceramics often create a profound artistic conception through elements such as shape, patterns, and colors, and poems describe this artistic conception in words. The line "The plain embryo outlines the blue-and-white patterns, with the brush strokes fading from thick to light; the peonies painted on the bottle are just like your first makeup" depicts the elegant, fresh, and infinitely charming artistic conception of blue-and-white porcelain. In translation, appropriate language and rhetorical devices should be used to accurately convey this artistic conception to foreign readers, allowing them to feel the unique aesthetic charm of traditional Chinese art and

enhance the international appeal of Chinese culture. In addition, the beauty of symmetry and the beauty of lines reflected in ceramic poems are also important components of Chinese aesthetic concepts and should not be ignored in translation.

3.3 The Translation of Chinese Society in Ceramic Poems and the Dissemination of the National Image

Ceramic poems originate from the lives of the Chinese people, recording the social conditions of different eras, the daily lives of ordinary people, and the emotions between people. They are like “living fossils” that reflect the style of Chinese society. Accurate translation can help foreigners view China not just through a single “Oriental impression”, but directly experience the richness and vitality of Chinese society, contributing to the creation of a real and comprehensive image of Chinese society. “Due to the implicit beauty or hazy beauty of Chinese culture, Chinese poems are good at using images, which often carry symbolic meanings rather than literal ones, and the specific meanings in the text must be understood. Therefore, in the translation of ceramic poems, translators must accurately convey the cultural connotations of such words, so that target language readers can understand the specific meanings of the words. Dragons and phoenixes are unique cultural images in China; in addition to expressing their literal meanings, their cultural connotations also need to be conveyed to help foreign readers understand their symbolic meanings, thereby truly understanding the content that the poem intends to express and pursuing the greatest degree of meaning equivalence.” [8]

From the perspective of social production, ceramic poems are a window to understanding Chinese society, recording the connection between the ceramic industry and people's livelihood economy. For example, Mei Yaochen's “The Potter” reflects the hard work of potters and the differences in social division of labor, which is consistent with the record in Wang Hongwei's “Production Space and Spatial Production of Contemporary Chinese Ceramic Creative Parks”. “With the emergence of various levels of imperial kilns, official kilns, or tribute porcelain kilns, the dependence of ceramic production space on ceramic raw materials, ceramic fuels, water transportation, and even market issues has gradually weakened.”[9]

From the perspective of social life and etiquette, ceramic poems reflect the close connection between ceramics and the lives and etiquette of the Chinese people: ceramics are not only tableware and ritual items but also carriers of the elegance of literati. For instance, Du Fu's poems describe drinking tea in plain porcelain, reflecting the tea and porcelain culture of the Tang Dynasty; poems of the Ming and Qing dynasties mention “preparing a hundred pieces of porcelain before marrying a daughter”, showing the implication of “auspiciousness and durability” of porcelain in wedding customs and folk values.

From the perspective of social emotions and collective memory, ceramic poems carry the national and local sentiments of the Chinese people. For example, the line “The porcelain cup of the hometown reflects the bright moon” expresses nostalgia, and poems during the War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression demonstrate national cohesion. In translation, it is necessary to explore the national treasure and the perseverance of the national spirit embodied in the characteristic of “porcelain being fragile yet tough”, and supplement historical backgrounds to help foreign readers understand that ceramics are a carrier of the collective emotions and memories of Chinese society.

3.4 The Translation of Chinese Technology in Ceramic Poems and the Dissemination of the National Image

Ceramic production is an outstanding representative of ancient Chinese technology. The

descriptions of the production process in ceramic poems provide valuable materials for spreading ancient technology. Their translation can not only showcase the glory of ancient Chinese technology but also enhance China's national image in the field of technology. The article "Research on the Colored Treatment for the Restoration of Blue and White Porcelain in Art Exhibitions" explores key technologies such as color analysis, material selection, and coloring processes by analyzing the typical damage types, restoration principles, and steps involved in blue-and-white porcelain.[10] For example, when translating the line "White glaze and blue-and-white porcelain are fired in one kiln", it is necessary to explain in detail the kiln temperature control technology behind "fired in one kiln" (China was already able to stably reach a temperature of over 1200 °C in the Tang Dynasty), so that foreign readers understand that ancient Chinese technology was not just "experience accumulation" but based on a systematic understanding of physical and chemical laws.

The selection of raw materials, shaping, and firing in ceramic production all contain rich scientific and technological knowledge. Gong Shi's "Ceramic Songs" of the Qing Dynasty, which writes "White glaze and blue-and-white porcelain are fired in one kiln, with patterns clearly showing through the glaze", describes the firing process of blue-and-white porcelain. Key technological points need to be explained in detail during translation. In terms of raw material selection, Xingzi kaolin, Yaoli glaze fruit, Chenwan porcelain stone, Sanbaopeng porcelain stone, and Qimen porcelain stone are used as raw materials for making the body. Firing is carried out under reducing atmosphere conditions at different temperatures to explore the influence of raw material ratios on the chromaticity of the body of imitated Yuan Dynasty blue-and-white porcelain.[11] In terms of firing, the firing temperature and microstructure have a decisive impact on the glaze color and glaze quality. Therefore, in further research by four researchers—Zhang Fukang, Tao Guangyi, Ruan Meiling from the Shanghai Institute of Ceramics, Chinese Academy of Sciences, and Yuan Haiqing from the Chinese Ancient Ceramics Research Association, it was found that the microstructure of Ru porcelain glaze layers has roughly four different types.[12]

In ancient ceramic production, inventions such as the potter's wheel and sagger were manifestations of the wisdom of ancient people. If poems contain descriptions of these inventions, their invention background, principles, and contributions to ceramic technology should be explained during translation to highlight the practicality and innovation of ancient technology and shape the image of China as a powerful country in ancient technology. If modern ceramic poems involve contemporary achievements such as new ceramic materials and digital technology, their translation can showcase the innovation capabilities of modern Chinese technology and its transformation of traditional industries, reflecting the continuity of technological exploration and enhancing China's status on the international technological stage.

3.5 The Translation of Chinese Systems in Ceramic Poems and the Dissemination of the National Image

The clues to ancient handicraft, foreign trade, and other systems implied in ceramic poems are important materials for interpreting the "rational core" and "people's livelihood orientation" of traditional systems. Accurate translation can break the Western stereotype of ancient Chinese systems as "autocratic and rigid". "The development of the domestic economy in the Tang and Song dynasties promoted the development of foreign trade, and the development of foreign trade, in turn, had an important impact on the social economy at that time." [13] "During the Ming and Qing dynasties, with the rise of the commodity economy, metal products such as copper coins and ironware became important commodities. The production and circulation of these metal products not only promoted the prosperity of urban economy but also strengthened the connection between

handicrafts and commercial trade.”[14]

From the perspective of the handicraft management system, the descriptions of official kilns and folk kilns in ceramic poems reflect the characteristics of the ancient Chinese system of hierarchical management, balancing quality and people's livelihood. “In the production process of official kilns, relying on the strong financial resources of the royal family and the exquisite skills of top craftsmen, the control of raw materials reached an extreme level. From the careful selection of high-quality porcelain clay to the delicate preparation of glaze, every link was handled meticulously.”[15] There are also poems describing folk kilns as “pricing according to the market and conducting free transactions”. “The firing of blue-and-white porcelain in folk kilns of Jingdezhen in the Ming Dynasty was a microcosm of the ceramic-making labor in Jingdezhen and also a microcosm of ancient Chinese folk labor. The abundant labor force after the mid-Ming Dynasty was also one of the important reasons for the full development of folk kilns in Jingdezhen at the end of the Ming Dynasty.”[16]

From the perspective of the foreign trade system, scenes such as “porcelain inspection by the Maritime Trade Department” and “official ships protecting porcelain merchants” in ceramic poems (e.g., “Porcelain arrays in front of the Maritime Trade Department, sailing across the ocean after official document inspection”) confirm that the ancient foreign trade system was “standardized, orderly, open, and inclusive”. “A dedicated institution was established in the Western Market of Chang'an to manage foreign merchants, forming an institutionalized international exchange network. Different from the Roman Empire, which indirectly controlled the Eurasian trade network, the Tang Dynasty controlled the Silk Road through direct military garrisons and administrative systems. This proactive geopolitical strategy made it a world empire with both the effectiveness of centralization and the inclusiveness of multiculturalism.”[17] Rules of the Maritime Silk Road in the Song Dynasty can also be supplemented, such as the quality supervision of ceramic exports and the preferential policies for foreign merchants, to help foreign readers understand that ancient foreign trade was not “unordered smuggling” but a standardized and mutually beneficial model led by the government. This corrects the misunderstanding that “ancient China had no rules for foreign exchanges” and demonstrates the tradition of the system being “order-oriented and win-win-promoting”.

From the perspective of the cultural management system, the descriptions of “royal promotion of ceramic culture” in ceramic poems (e.g., Emperor Qianlong writing ceramic poems and compiling “Tao Shuo” [On Ceramics], and the poem line “Imperial brush writing poems to praise ceramic art, imperial compilation of classics to pass on craftsmanship”) reflect the characteristic of the ancient system of “valuing cultural inheritance and innovation”. In addition, descriptions of the “intangible cultural heritage protection system” and “traditional craft revitalization policies” in modern ceramic poems can be linked to China's contemporary cultural protection system during translation. This showcases the continuity and innovation of Chinese systems in relation to historical culture, further strengthening China's national image of “valuing cultural inheritance and promoting sustainable development”.

4. Conclusion

This study clarifies the core connections between the translation of ceramic poems and the dissemination of China's national image, and verifies the value of ceramic poems as a dissemination carrier from the five dimensions of history, culture, society, technology, and system. Theoretically, it breaks through the limitations of single-dimensional research, establishes a logical framework of “translation—cultural transmission—national image”, and fills gaps in relevant research. Practically, it sorts out suitable translation strategies and practical suggestions to provide

support for translators and communication institutions, helping to upgrade the national image from “symbolic dissemination” to “value recognition”. In the future, the scope of audience surveys can be expanded, and efficient communication paths can be explored in combination with digital technology, so that ceramic poems can become a link for exchanges and mutual learning between Chinese and foreign civilizations and convey a real and three-dimensional image of China.

Acknowledgement

This paper is supported by 2025 Jiangxi Province College Students Innovation Training Project entitled “Research on the Communication of China’s National Image Based on Ceramic Poetry Translation” (State-Level, 202510408027), by Jiangxi Social Science Fund Project (24WT36), by Jingdezhen Social Science Fund Project (25SKGH083), and by JCU New Liberal Arts Foreign Language Teaching Team on Ceramics.

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