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HYPERBOLE IN CLASSICAL CHINESE POETRY AND ENGLISH TRANSLATION

***Abstract:** Classical Chinese poetry is a microcosm of the history of Chinese civilization, and plays a vital role in the process of communication and mutual learning between Chinese and Western poetics, historiography and civilization. Hyperbole is a rhetorical device with rich expressive power. In the process of poetry creation, poets often use the technique of numeral hyperbole to describe events, portray scenery, express emotions and aspirations, and achieve superb artistic effects. This paper expounds the artistic value of hyperbole in classical Chinese poetry, and summarizes three translation strategies of numeral hyperbole in the translation of classical poetry on the basis of corpus and literature analysis.*

***Keywords :** Classical Chinese poetry, numeral hyperbole, translation methods*

I. Research Background

1. The External Dissemination of Classical Chinese Poetry

The traditional Chinese culture which has a long history continues to influence the world with its unique value system and poetic expressions. Classical Chinese poetry is the essence of traditional Chinese culture. They not only reflect the beauty of words and thinking, but more importantly, they contain very rich cultural connotations and values.

The history of China is hidden in the lines of poetry. The poetry of all dynasties connected together is a miniature of the history of Chinese civilization. The poetry of the past dynasties records the political, economic, cultural, social and other aspects of the past dynasties. President Xi Jinping put forward the guiding ideology of “One Belt

One Road” to Promote economic development and the exchange and dissemination of Chinese and foreign cultures. The translation of Chinese classical literary works, including poetry, has received unprecedented attention so as to promote the distribution of traditional Chinese culture and classics to the world, and to enhance the international influence of Chinese culture.

In the era of cultural globalization, the translation of classical Chinese poetry plays a vital role in the external dissemination of Chinese traditional culture and the exchange of global culture.

2. The Artistic Value of Hyperbole in Classical Chinese Poetry

Classical Chinese poetry has rich cultural connotation and eternal charm because of its concise words, implicit artistic conception and integration of poetry and painting. Poets often use some rhetorical devices to make the language vivid and colorful. In classical poems, rhetoric is an important artistic means, which helps to enhance the artistic appeal of the works, arouse the readers' rich imagination and achieve the sublime and unspeakable beauty. Poets often use the artistic technique of numeral hyperbole in their creation to enhance the language appeal and expression effect. The numeral hyperbole in classical Chinese poetry produced the following artistic effects.

(1) Vivid Description

When describing the objective world, Chinese poets like to use the artistic technique of numeral hyperbole to depict natural scenery and objective things in a magical and magnificent way, which makes the language of poetry vivid and lively. Here is a poem by Li Bai, one of the greatest poets in Tang Dynasty.

LI SHAN WATERFALL – Li Bai

The sun SHINES UPON THE Censer Peak, where purple mist begins to rise;
A waterfall in the distance hangs over the river before my eyes.
Down **three thousand feet** its pouring water hurtles;
I wonder if it's the Milky Way fallen from **the nine skies**.

(Tr. by He Zhongjian) [1]

There are two numeral hyperboles in this poem. The first one is “three thousand feet,” by using magical hyperbole, the poet presents the magnificent momentum of the towering Mountains and the waterfalls which are flying down. The vivid description makes the readers feel as if they were standing in front of the huge waterfall themselves. The second numeral hyperbole is “the Milky Way fallen from **the nine skies.**” In ancient Chinese myths and legends, people believe that there are nine levels of heavens, which means the sky is very high and far away. Seen from a distance, the waterfall comes straight down from the sky and looks like a galaxy falling from the clouds. The use of numeral hyperbole paints a wonderful picture of the overwhelming and magnificent scenery of Lu Mountain and the Waterfall, meanwhile it shows the poet's passionate and heroic spirit as well.

(2) Emotional Expression

Numeral hyperbole plays an important role in conveying the poet's earnest thoughts and feelings. The poets use words to express his concern for the people, the pain of war and chaos, his desire to contribute to the country, his sympathy for the sufferings of the common people, his sadness over the passing of time and his yearning for his hometown. The numeral hyperboles are affecting and exactly convey the sincere feelings and arouses strong resonance among readers. Du Fu, a great realistic writer and poet of the Tang Dynasty, in the poem "Spring View" expressed his concern about the fate of the country, his yearning for his relatives and his wish for peace.

Spring View

The signal-smoking has lasted for three months long,
A letter from home is worth gold ten-thousand Liang.

(Tr. By Zhu Manhua) [2]

This sentence is both realistic and exaggerated. “The signal-smoking has lasted for three months long” is realistic; “A letter from home is worth gold ten-thousand Liang.” is exaggerated. It expresses the urgency of people looking forward to letters from family to report their safety due to the isolation of news during the war. This numeral hyperbole highlighted the pain and desperation caused by the war.

(3) Rich imagination Numeral hyperbole is a rhetorical device which is widely used in literary works. In order to impress the readers, the poets develop rich associations and use the method of numeral hyperbole in the poems. They link their true feelings with the things in nature so as to stimulate readers' imagination and help readers understand the original poets' feelings. Emotional resonance is achieved naturally. Take another poem by Li Bai for example:

You go ten thousand miles, drifting away / Like an unrooted water-grass.

(Tr. by S. Obata) [3]

This sentence is a good illustration of numeral hyperbole. Then Li Bai's friend was going on an expedition, and Li Bai sent him outside the village. They were going to part. "Ten thousand and miles" would arouse readers' imagination, and it is a long way to go. Like the rootless grass, floating to the distance. The numeral hyperbole here expresses the poet's concern about his friend's future.

II. Research Objective

Poets often use the artistic technique of numeral hyperbole in their creation to enhance the appeal of language. Numeral hyperbole can vividly describe objective things in nature and express strong feelings. How to use appropriate methods to translate this rhetorical device and convey the profound cultural connotation of classical poetry in English? It is a difficult task for translators.

Eugene Nida pointed out that translation is the closest and most natural equivalent discourse representation in the target language from semantics to style. Translation is not only the conversion of symbols between two languages, but also a cross-cultural communication activity. The translation of classical poetry is to faithfully reproduce the form and connotation of the original poems in target language, so that the target language readers can obtain the same or similar resonance and aesthetic experience as the source language readers. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to explore the translation methods of the rhetorical device of numeral hyperbole in Chinese classical poetry in order that the English versions has the same poetic and pictorial meaning as Chinese ones, and then let foreign readers and poetry lovers feel the charm of Chinese culture.

III. Research Findings

Due to the differences in history, culture and social customs between different countries, the interpretation of numeral hyperbole is not the same. Therefore, the translation of numeral hyperbole is an important part of classical poetry translation. This paper summarizes and four effective translation strategies of numeral hyperbole in Classical Chinese poetry.

1. Liberal translation

Liberal translation is a method of translation that only keeps the meaning of the original text but not the form of the original text. In order to accurately convey the meaning of numeral hyperbole and make it easy for English readers to understand, liberal translation can be adopted without violating the original meaning.

The number "nine" plays an extremely important role in traditional Chinese culture. Because "nine" is the polar of the positive number and the largest of the singular number. It is often regarded as the "supreme number" which has the meaning of "great, very high, very far", and is often used by poets for numeral hyperbole. However, in English the number "nine" has no such cultural connotation.

There is another English version for Li Bai's poem "I wonder if it's the Milky Way fallen from **the nine skies**." Mr. Xu Yuanchong's version is: "As if the Silver River fell from azure sky" [4]. Literal translation of "nine skies" will cause confusion for English readers for according to the common sense that there is only one sky. Mr. Xu Yuanchong allows for the comprehension of the target language readers and chooses translation methods acceptable to English readers. So, Xu's version seems to be more perfect.

2. Conversion

"Conversion" refers to the method of transforming the numeral hyperbole in the original poem into other parts of speech, such as adjectives, in the process of translation. Hyperbole, in its essence, is a way to describe people or things, but this description is exaggerated. Therefore, it is acceptable that the numeral hyperboles are converted into corresponding adjectives. For example, there is such a sentence in a poem by Li Shen (a poet of the Tang Dynasty): "plant a grain of millet in spring, and harvest ten thousand

seeds in autumn”. The numeral hyperbole here refers to the high yield of autumn harvest, so the translator chooses the adjective "high" to express the same meaning. “Each seed when sown in spring, Will make autumn yields high” (Tr. By Xu Yuanchong) [5].

3. Omission

Omission is a method which omit words that are self-evident in the context, or words which appear abrupt, cumbersome or unfit for the convention of the target language if translated. When translating classical Chinese poetry, we can adopt the method of omission to deal with the numeral hyperbole. Take Li Bai’ s poem as an example:

To Wang Lun (friend) – Li Bai

I, Li Bai, sit in a boat about to go,
When suddenly on shore your farewell songs overflow.
However deep the Lake of Peach Blossoms may be,
It’s not so deep, O Wang Lun! As your love for me.

(Tr. by Xu Yuanchong) [6]

There is a numeral hyperbole in the third sentence in the Chinese poem: “The water in the Lake of Peach Blossom is nearly one thousand feet deep”, and this is the highlight in the poem, “one thousand feet” is not exaggerating the depth of the Peach Blossom Lake but a hyperbole. Mr. Xu omitted the image “one thousand feet” and employed an exclamatory sentence pattern to form a contrast. “How deep the lake of Peach Blossoms may be”, “It’s not so deep, O Wang Lun! As your love for me.” His translation praises the sincere feelings among friends without losing the meaning and artistic conception of the original poem.

IV. Conclusion

Numeral hyperboles are often used by poets to exaggerate things when describing the objective world. In classical Chinese poetry, numeral hyperboles not only promote the poets’ emotion, but also impress the readers and help them understand the poems better. Aiming at the translation strategies of numeral hyperbole in Chinese classical poetry, this paper summarizes three methods based on the collected corpus – liberal

translation, conversion and omission. Translators should accurately understand the original poems and then select an appropriate way to reproduce the poets' thoughts and connotation.

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中国古典诗词中的夸张修辞手法及其英译研究

摘要：中国古典诗词是一部中华文明史的缩影，在中西方诗学、史学乃至文明交流与互鉴的过程中都发挥至关重要的作用。夸张是一种表达力非常丰富的修辞手段，诗人在诗词创作过程中常用数字夸张这一手法来叙述事件，写景状物，抒情明志，达到出神入化的艺术效果。本文阐述夸张这一修辞方法在中国古典诗词中的艺术价值，在语料和文献分析的基础上总结古诗的翻译过程中数字夸张的三个翻译策略。

关键词：中国古典诗歌、数字夸张、翻译方法