

The Significance of Chinese Ancient Poetry Translations in the Humanities Education: A Case Study on Literature Courses for International Students at USST

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Abstract

Chinese ancient poetry has always been an important part of humanistic education. However, for international students, due to language and cultural barriers, the traditional Chinese ancient poetry education sometimes can not achieve the expected effect. By introducing excellent translations into the literature courses, we hope international students could understand, enjoy and delight in Chinese classic poems, share the gracefulness as well as the intelligence of Chinese cultural tradition and cultivate their humanistic spirit.

Keywords

Chinese ancient poetry translations; Humanities education; International students.

1. The Value of Chinese Ancient Poetry Translations in International Students' Humanities Education

1.1. Chinese Ancient Poetry

As Confucius said, poetry serves to inspire, to reflect, to communicate and to criticize. In this way, poetry is the expression of the mind, and is always regarded as a sign of cultural level of a nation. Chinese ancient poetry is one of the most precious treasure of Chinese traditional culture. From Book of Poetry (Shi Jing) and Elegies of the South (Chu Ci), to the poems and songs during the Tang, Song and Yuan Dynasties, Chinese ancient poetry is extremely significant in building and shaping the culture of the Chinese nation.

1.2. The Necessity of Chinese Ancient Poetry Translations in Humanities Education for International Students

Chinese ancient poetry education plays an important role in shaping the humanistic spirit, however, for international students, mastering basic Chinese language skills does not mean that they can enter the essence of Chinese culture. They still have a long way to go in understanding and appreciating Chinese ancient poetry. In this case, the importance of the translations is highlighted. As early as 19th century, Herbert A Giles published his rhymed translations of Tang poems. In 1929 Witter Bynner published his Jade Mountains in the United States, and in 1973 Innes Herdan published her translations in England. In recent years, translations of Ancient Chinese poems have already sprung up. As China's opening-up continues to deepen, Chinese ancient poetry is not only a cultural bond linking the thoughts and emotions of all Chinese people, but also the best example of Chinese culture going to the world. In addition, it is an important bridge for international students and Chinese culture.

1.3. Xu Yuanchong and His Chinese Ancient Poetry Translations

Among many excellent translations, Xu Yuanchong's translations were selected for our course. Xu has been engaged in translation for 70 years. He won the Lifetime Achievement Award in

Translation conferred by Translators Association of China(TAC) in 2010, and won the Aurora Borealis Prize for International Translation of Fiction Literature, conferred by the Federation of International Translators(FIT) in 2014.He is honored as the only expert who translates Chinese poems into both English and French.[1] The one we choose in our class is called Collection of Classical Chinese Poetry and Prose, which gathers his most representative English translations including 300 Tang Pomes, Selected Lyrice of Tang and Five Dynasties,300 Song Lyrics and 300 Yuan Songs.

2. The Psychological State of International Students and the Necessity of Humanities Education

With the continuous opening and prosperity of China's economy and society, a large number of international students come to China to further their studies. The Chinese government has also continued to open her arms to international students, building platforms and increasing support for attracting them to China. As a result, more and more international students appear in all kinds of activities in China's universities. On the other hand, while the study and life of international students gradually get on the right track, some deep-seated emotional and psychological problems are also gradually revealed. In this case, the necessity and importance of humanities education for international students have emerged.

2.1. Social Dilemmas and the Absence of Friendship

Students from overseas have traveled thousands of miles to China. In addition to coping with high-intensity study pressure, they also have to face a lot of unknown difficulties alone. The feeling of helplessness and loneliness after leaving relatives and friends is something that most of them never imagine before they enter the university. In addition, different ethnic groups have different ways of expressing their emotions, and the implicit and introverted characteristics of Chinese cultural traditions make the road of friendship among international students in China even more difficult.In my class, many international students expressed their confusion about how to establish friendship with Chinese students. As teachers who undertake humanities education, they have the responsibility to combine their professional expertise and give effective guidance to this problem in daily teaching activities.

2.2. Growing Homesickness under the Impact of the Epidemic

At the beginning of 2020, the sudden outbreak of COVID-19 disrupted people's pace of life, and also brought new challenges to the education and management of international students in China. Under the impact of the epidemic, many international students canceled their plans to their home country and chose to stay in China to ensure the their studies and reserch.Till now, most of them have not returned to their hometowns for nearly two years. How to help them resolve their homesickness and maintain a positive and optimistic psychological state is also a problem to be solved in the humanities education of international students.

2.3. Lack of Confidence in Long-term Life in China Due to Cultural Barriers

China's high-speed, high-quality development is very attractive to international students for future employment. In the language courses offered by the university, the international students have preliminarily mastered Chinese listening, speaking, reading and writing skills, and can carry out the daily communication. However, after initially overcoming the language challenge, to understand the deeper part of Chinese culture and truly integrate into China is also a problem that many international students need to face in the future. Therefore, for humanities teachers,how to combine their own professional background,excavate the powerful

spiritual strength, inspire them to face all kinds of unknown challenges with an open-minded attitude, is also an urgent task.

3. Practice of International Students' Humanities Education Based on Chinese Ancient Poetry Translations

3.1. Open the Door to Friendship: Close Reading of "An Invitation" Written by Bai Juyi

Friendship is a common theme in ancient Chinese poetry. Among these works, a short poem entitled "Wen Liu Shijiu" written by Bai Juyi, a famous poet of Tang Dynasty, is particularly touching. Literally, the title means to ask a man named Liu Shijiu some questions. However, judging from the content, the poem expresses the intention of inviting friends to have a cup of drink. The expression of emotion in Chinese poets is often implicit. So, on the surface, the poem only mentions there is a pot of warm wine, and I wonder if Liu can drink it on a snowy day. Of course, Chinese readers who are familiar with Chinese cultural traditions can easily understand the hidden meaning of "invitation". However, when reading the Chinese version word for word, international students often feel confused about what the work is trying to express.

Xu Yuanchong's translation well deals with the relationship between literal translation and free translation, so as to solve this problem. For the title of the poem, he directly translated the implicit "to Ask Liu Shijiu" into "An Invitation" according to the following content, and the whole poem is translated as follows:

AN INVITATION

My new brew gives green glow;

My red clay stove flames up.

At dusk it threatens snow.

Won't you come for a cup? (2)

In the clear meaning and beautiful rhythm, foreign students can easily understand the content of this poem. And in the artistic conception of poetry, they are more willing to try to open their heart and take the initiative to find valuable friendship.

3.2. From Sinking into Homesickness to Praying for the World: Close Reading of "Prelude To Water Melody" written by Su Shi

Due to the epidemic, many international students are unable to return to their hometown. Since their homesickness cannot be avoided, it is necessary for humanities teachers to give them spiritual strength through humanities education. In my literature class, I share Su Shi's most famous lyrics "Prelude To Water Melody" translated by Xu Yuanchong:

Tune: Prelude To Water Melody

How long will the full moon appear?

Wine cup in hand, I ask the sky.

I do not know what time of the year

It would be tonight in the palace on high.

Riding the wind, there I would fly,

Yet I'm afraid the crystalline palace would be

Too high and cold for me.

I rise and dance, with my shadow I play.

On high as on earth, would it be as gay?

The moon goes round the mansions red

Through gauze-draped window soft to shed
Her light upon the sleepless bed.
Why then when people part, is the oft full and bright?
Men have sorrow and joy; they part or meet again;
The moon is bright or dim and she may wax or wane.
There has been nothing perfect since the olden days.
So let us wish that man
Will live long as he can!
Though miles apart, we'll share the beauty she displays. [3]

From this lyrics, combined with the poet's life, international students can understand that people may encounter all kinds of disappointments in their life. Even if we are destined not to be reunited with our relatives, we don't need to immerse ourselves in sadness all the time. Instead of sadness, we can also choose to look forward to the future, to pray for ourselves, for our families and for our common world.

3.3. Hope for the Future: Close Reading of "Farewell to A Lutist" Written by Gao Shi

When facing all kinds of unknowns in life, people often feel lack of confidence. Especially for international students, although they are full of aspirations for China, due to cultural differences, they still have doubts about whether they can adapt to long-term life in China, obtain the recognition of Chinese society and realize their ideals. Whenever they express such concerns, I always share the poem "Farewell to a Lutist" with them:

Farewell to a Lutist
Yellow clouds spread for miles and miles have veiled the day;
The north wind blows down snow and wild geese fly away.
Fear not you've no admirers as you go along!
There is no connoisseur on earth but loves your song. [4]

In the farewell poems of the Tang Dynasty, those sad and lingering works are deeply moving, but another kind of generous and heroic poetry has painted another bold and vigorous color for the poetry world with its sincere friendship and strong faith. Gao Shi's poem is a good piece of the latter style. With a cheerful mind and a heroic tone, Gao Shi spoke the parting message enthusiastically, generously and inspiring. Xu Yuanhong accurately grasped the emotion in the poem and translated it into English with a lively rhythm, perfectly transmitting the poet's heroic mind. It is appropriate to use such works to encourage international students to ride the wind and waves and set sail fearlessly.

4. Conclusion

The fundamental mission of education is to "cultivate people". Different from professional education which is focusing on knowledge acquisition and experience accumulation, the core of humanities education is to enrich humanistic spirit, cultivate ideal personality, and pay attention to human emotion, value and dignity. This paper focuses on the humanities education for international students, and reveals the significance of Chinese ancient poetry translations in understanding Chinese culture and cultivating humanistic spirit. Since international students have become an important part of Chinese universities, how to make humanities education play a more active role in their growth and success, humanistic teachers still need to explore more in the future.

References

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- [4] Y.C. Xu:300 Tang Poems (China Intercontinental Press, China 2020), p.66.