

A Study on Cultural Default and Compensation Strategies in the English Translation of Ancient Poems about Lushan Mountain under the Background of Culture-Tourism Integration: A Case Study of Li Bai's Poems

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Abstract

Taking Li Bai's poems about Lushan Mountain as a case study, this paper explores cultural defaults in the English translation of ancient Chinese poems themed on Lushan. Under the background of cultural communication, the study systematically analyzes how cultural elements are lost or distorted in translation. It reveals that cultural default manifests predominantly in three dimensions: symbol level, involving unique lexical and syntactic features; meaning level, concerning culturally specific meanings and allusions; and aesthetic level, related to poetic rhythm and imagery. Corresponding compensation strategies are put forward for each type of default. Furthermore, the paper explores how these strategies can be applied in culture-tourism contexts. Effective compensation for cultural default is shown to foster a synergistic relationship between culture and tourism, offering new perspectives for interdisciplinary research on ancient poem translation while providing practical schemes for the international promotion of Lushan Scenic Area.

Keywords

Culture-Tourism Integration
Cultural Default
Translation Compensation
Li Bai's Poems

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1. Introduction

At present, China has positioned culture-tourism as a "pillar industry, and deepens the integration path of "cultural tourism + hundreds of industries" through policies. The *Several Measures on Further Cultivating New Growth Points to Prosper Cultural and Tourism*

Consumption released by the General Office of the State Council in 2025 clearly pointed out that it is necessary to "enrich the supply of inbound tourism products" and carry out "Hello! China "promotes national image to enhance cultural soft power"^[1]. It will further expand the scope of visa-freedom and enhance the experience of foreign

tourists. These policies directly point to the research topic of cultural translation. Through translation, it eliminates cross-cultural cognitive barriers and makes my country's traditional culture a sensible and understandable international tourism element.

Culture is the core of tourism, and tourism is the carrier of culture. culture provides a continuous source of inspiration for tourism innovation, and through its innovative combination with modern technology, traditional cultural elements can be presented in more vivid and interactive forms^[2]. As a famous tourist attraction, Lushan Mountain carries ancient poems not only a treasure house of literature, but also an important part of tourism resources. Poets such as Li Bai constructed the cultural image of Lushan Mountain with their words and became a cultural medium for tourists to understand Lushan Mountain. In the context of the culture-tourism integration, the English translation of ancient Lushan poems is not only a transformation of language symbols, but also a practical carrier for the development of Jiujiang international culture and tourism. This article systematically deconstructs the cultural defaults of Li Bai's poetry and designs a compensation plan that conforms to policy orientation, helps Lushan to upgrade from a "geographical attraction" to a "cultural magnetic field" and achieves the strategic goal of building a famous Jiujiang international cultural and tourism City.

2. Theoretical basis

In the context of culture-tourism integration, the English translation of ancient poems in Lushan is particularly important. It not only concerns cultural dissemination, but also involves tourism promotion. However, in this process, the cultural default phenomenon cannot be ignored. Cultural default, that is, due to the cultural differences between the source language and the target language during the translation process, some cultural information is omitted or cannot be accurately conveyed in the translation. Wang Dongfeng proposed that the "meaning vacuum" caused by cultural default in cross-cultural translation needs to be resolved through compensation^[3]. Based on this theory, Shao Rongqing proposed that the free translation compensation strategy is an important means to make up for the default of

English literary translation culture^[4]. This phenomenon is particularly prominent in the English translation of ancient Lushan poems. Many words and images with profound cultural connotations are difficult to find accurate English equivalents.

Cultural translation theory provides a theoretical basis for the verbal default in ancient poetry translation. Scholars such as Basnett emphasize the close relationship between translation and culture, place translation research in the context of cultural research, and highlight communication and understanding between different cultures^[5]. The cultural default refers to the information gap formed by the original text that the author believes is known to the reader due to cultural background differences in the target readers^[6]. The core purpose of the English translation of Lushan ancient poetry is to convey the cultural value of Lushan to foreign tourists, and then stimulate their tourism interest. Therefore, translation needs to be guided by the target readers' cognitive level and tourism needs, and adjust the presentation of cultural elements.

3. Analysis of the cultural default in Li Bai's poems about Lushan

3.1. Manifestations of Cultural Default

Under the background of the culture-tourism integration, the English translation of ancient poems in Lushan will not only help spread Chinese traditional culture, but also promote cultural exchanges between China and foreign countries. When analyzing the cultural defaults in English translation of ancient poems in Lushan, the author selects Li Bai's poems as study cases. Li Bai's poems contain rich cultural elements, such as landscapes, myths and legends, historical figures, etc., which are all treasures of Chinese culture. However, in the process of English translation, these cultural elements are often difficult to accurately convey due to language and cultural differences. For example, in Li Bai's poems about Lushan Mountain often praise landscapes and recall history. These elements are difficult to find a complete corresponding equivalents in English, thus easily leading to cultural default.

Specifically, the cultural default manifestations in the English-translated version mainly focus on the following aspects: First, the default of the language symbol layer,

and specific cultural symbols are out of touch with the original text in the English translation process. For example, “Xianglu”(香炉) refers to the censer peak in Li Bai’s poems, but the English-translated version is easily misunderstood as a incense-burning utensil(censer). Second, the default of the meaning layer, and the deep meaning of cultural images will be lost. For example, if the “Jiu tian”(九天) in “疑是银河落九天” is translated as “blue sky” or “heaven”, it will lose its oriental philosophical cultural connotation; Third, the aesthetic layer defaults, such as the exaggerated technique of “飞流直下三千尺” and the mythological image of “疑是银河落九天”, these all need to be compensated to achieve the effectiveness of cultural tourism communication.

3.2. The impact of cultural default on readers’ understanding

The impact of cultural default on readers’ understanding is profound. First, readers of the target language may not be able to fully understand the cultural connotation contained in the translation due to differences in cultural backgrounds. For example, the beauty of the landscape and the poet’s emotions towards nature depicted by the “Lushan Ballad”(庐山谣) in Li Bai’s poems may lose its original charm due to cultural defaults when translated in English. In addition, cultural defaults can lead to loss of meaning or misunderstanding. During the translation process, certain specific cultural elements may be omitted because they cannot find the appropriate English equivalents, which not only weakens the artistic conception of the original poem, but may also cause misunderstandings among readers of the target language^[7].

Taking Li Bai’s “Looking at the Waterfall in Lushan Mountain” as an example, the lines “飞流直下三千尺，疑是银河落九天” depicts the beauty of the Waterfall in Lushan Mountain. However, in the process of English translation, how to accurately convey the cultural artistic conception and exaggeration techniques contained in “三千尺” and “九天” is a major challenge. If the translation is improper, it is likely that the target language readers will not be able to understand this unique cultural expression and may even lead to misunderstandings.

Table 1. The impact of cultural default on readers’ understanding

Original poems	Default English translation	Default type	Difficulty in understanding
琴心三叠	before the lute’s third playing	Taoist terms	Taoist cultivation
楚狂人	the madman of Chu country	Allusions to figures	Political metaphors
南半傍	beside the Southern Dipper	Geographical features	No corresponding culture

Therefore, it is crucial to strengthen connections with the international tourism market and meet the needs and preferences of international tourists. In this way, it would provide support for the promotion of Lushan Mountain tourism^[8].

4. Exploration of cultural compensation from the perspective of cultural and tourism integration

In view of the above cultural default phenomena, under the background of cultural-tourism integration, translators should adopt corresponding compensation strategies in the process of English translation, taking into account cultural loyalty and tourists’ acceptance, and adopt flexible translation strategies for different scenarios, so that ancient poetry translation can be transformed from simple text translation to a medium for cultural exchange and dissemination.

4.1. Compensation for symbol-level default: literal translation + contextual supplement

In the default compensation practice of symbolic culture, simple literal translation often leads to the breakdown of cultural signifiers, while excessive naturalization can easily lead to the dissolution of cultural identity. For cultural proprietary items, translators can make minimal additions while retaining cultural symbols. This approach aims to accurately convey the original meaning while compensating for the barriers to understanding caused by cultural differences. The selection of additional content should follow the principles of relevance, accuracy and

Table 2. Compensation for symbol-level default

Cultural dimension	Primitive symbol	Translation compensation scheme	Transcoding principle
Material level	Sunlight and water vapor refraction phenomenon	violet mist (physical explicitness)	Retain the authenticity of the optical phenomenon
Symbolic level	Taoist auspicious codes	divine aura (spiritual explicitness)	Activate the noble semantic field of “violet”
Intertextual level	The allusion of “紫气东来”	Laozi reference	Establish historical textual connections

simplicity to ensure that readers can fully and in-depth understanding of the connotation of the poem. Taking Li Bai’s “望庐山瀑布” as an example, the physical carriers, poem steles and guide signs in the area can be translated in English through literal translation and annotation. Like the explanation sign of the Censer Peak of Lushan Mountain,

Original text: 香炉峰

Translation: Censer Peak (Xianglu Feng, named for its resemblance to ancient incense burners where Taoist rites were performed)

At the same time, with the help of smart navigation system, toursits can scan the physical objects with their mobile phones to pop up optional menus, realizing the expansion and contraction of English translation annotations.

For images that cannot be translated literally, the cultural context can be reconstructed within the lines of the poem, and the contextual translation method can be adopted to naturally incorporate explanatory elements into the poem, so that the default elements can be compensated within the cognitive scope of the translated readers. For example, the compensation case of “Ziyan”(紫烟) in Li Bai’s poem reflects the reconstruction logic of color symbols.

Translation: violent mist rises (divine aura in Taoism, recalling purple clouds heralding Laozi’s passage through Hangu Pass)

The translation uses color word “violet” to connect Western cultural cognition (symbolizes honorary), and establishes Taoist connections through parentheses, realizing the progressive interpretation of visual description to cultural meanings, and enhancing readers’ cultural understanding.

4.2. Compensation for meaning -level default: reconstruction of cultural schema

The default of cultural schema originates from the structural faults in which primitive readers share knowledge bases with translated readers. In the English translation of ancient poems about Lushan, this type of default is mainly manifested as historical allusions, philosophical concepts, and cognitive vacuum of collective memory. The Lushan Mountain described by Li Bai is not a simple natural scenery, but a concrete presentation of Taoism’s “harmony between man and nature”. Taking Li Bai’s “疑是银河落九天” as an example.

Table 3. meaning-level cultural default

Surface graphic	Lushan waterfalls, clouds and fogs	Reader deficiency
Middle-level graphic	Taoist fantasy imagination	cannot understanding metaphor
Deep graphic	Eastern philosophy: “the interaction between heaven and humanity” and “the mutual generation of emptiness and reality”	Different philosophical cognition

The default of the meaning-level mainly comes from differences in cultural schemas. In view of the deep cultural philosophy default, it is necessary to build a multi-dimensional system outside of translation for explanation. The translator achieves schema reconstruction through three strategies: First, hierarchical annotations complement the cultural context. In the comments of the translation, Xu Yuanchong clearly

stated that “银河 refers to the Milky Way in Chinese mythology, and ‘Nine Heavens’ is a Taoist concept of multi-layered celestial realms”, juxtaposing the hierarchy of Taoist cosmology with the “Milky Way” familiar to Western readers to build a correlation schema. Second, metaphor transformation builds a cognitive bridge. Burton Watson translates “九天” as “the ninth heaven”. Although the numerical form is retained, the ordinal characteristics of “ninth” suggest hierarchical differences, which reminds Western readers of the similar structure of the Nine Heavens in Dante’s “Divine Comedy” and forms a cross-cultural schema graft. Third, contextual narrative expands the space of meaning. In the introduction to the translation, Timothy Billings specifically explains “Lushan as the religious attributes of Taoism’s ‘thirty-sixth cave heaven’”, placing the image of “the Milky Way Falls in the Sky” in the cultural framework of “the blessed land of the cave heaven”, helping readers understand the metaphorical connection between the image of the waterfall and the “fairyland coming”.

In cultural and tourism scenarios, this schema reconstruction has practical significance. If the English guide manual of Lushan Scenic Area adopts the translation of “Nine Heavens (a Taoist celestial hierarchy where immortals reside)”, it can enable tourists to connect the natural landscape with Taoist fairyland imagination when watching the Lushan waterfall, forming a complete tourism cognitive chain of “physical viewing - cultural understanding - spiritual experience”.

4.3. Compensation of aesthetic-level default: re-creation of poetic form

The default compensation essence of the aesthetic level is the cross-cultural reconstruction of poetic forms. When Eastern poetry enters the English context, due to the differences in language structure and cultural traditions, it is easy to produce an aesthetic cultural default, and the tone rhythm in Chinese is difficult to reproduce in English. Taking Li Bai’s most famous seven-character quatrain “望庐山瀑布” as an example, the visual effects of “purple smoke” and “waterfall” are difficult to express in the English translation. In the context of cultural and tourism integration, the default compensation of the aesthetic layer requires creative transformation in the translation.

Translators can learn from the creative techniques of Western Imagery poetry for recreation. For example, the imagery pioneer Ezra Pound used the method of juxtaposition of images to minimize grammatical connection words^[9]. Taking the English translation of “遥看瀑布挂前川” as an example, the original sentence structure has four independent images, namely:

[遥看] + [瀑布] + [挂] + [前川]

If it is literally translated as “I see the waterfall hanging like a river upended.” Although the translation retains the meaning of the original text, it cannot reproduce the aesthetic artistic conception in the original poem. Therefore, translators may wish to learn from the creative techniques of imagery poetry, use punctuation marks appropriately, delete logical words, and retain only the four images in the original poem.

Translation: Afar: waterfall -- a river hung in air.

This translation strategy also draws on comments from foreign netizens on online social platforms such as Little Rednote on Chinese English “You swan, he frog.” Tourists in scenic areas come from different regions or countries, and their age, race, and education levels vary. Therefore, the aesthetic compensation for the English translation of poetry in scenic spots requires consideration of readers’ acceptance ability. This translation method that draws on Imaginary poetry also reflects the Eastern philosophical culture of “extreme vulgarity is extreme elegance, and extreme simplicity reaches extreme truth.”

5. Application path of compensation strategies in culture-tourism scenarios

Under the background of culture-tourism integration, compensation for cultural default in the English translation of ancient poems about Lushan needs to break through textual limitations and fully utilize the current advanced digital technology, experience design and regional collaboration for extensive publicity. Taking Li Bai’s poems about Lushan as an example, through immersive experience with digital technology, multi-modal cultural projects, and cross-regional collaboration and other methods, the chain system of “poetry text-cultural experience-tourism consumption” can be finally realized.

5.1. Immersive integration of digital exhibition system

Through the method of empowering culture in technology, the compensation strategy in English translation of poetry is transformed into a visual and interactive immersive experience, and VR and AR technologies are used to set up a “poetry realm restoration” experience at key viewing points in scenic spots. When tourists are in front of the Lushan Waterfall, they can scan with their mobile phones to learn about the beauty of landscapes in Li Bai’s poems, and then further understand the Taoist culture contained in the poems through explanations.

5.2. Multimodal transformation of cultural experience projects

Transform poetry translations into experiencing cultural projects. For example, planning a night tour project of “Toasting with the poet Li Bai under the moon” can be planned, and tea tables are set up in the major scenic spots to allow tourists to participate in the project to experience Lushan Yunwu Tea, by learning from the successful experience of Kun Tea in Wanshou Palace in Nanchang, and supplemented by traditional Chinese musical instruments, thereby fostering deep integration between the culture and tourism industries^[10]. Through scene-based performing, poetry can transcend language barriers and create emotional resonance. In addition, relevant Lushan cultural and creative products can be developed to realize the transfer of cultural carriers from text to physical objects.

5.3. Collaborative communication of cross-regional cultural and tourism

Jiujiang is located on the southern bank of the middle and lower reaches of the Yangtze River, at the intersection of the Yangtze River and the mouth of Poyang Lake.

With the unique geographical location advantages. It is possible to combine the poetry and geographical routes of the Yangtze River Basin to build a regional collaborative network of translation compensation. For example, if Jiujiang, Jiangxi join hands with Sichuan (Li Bai’s hometown), Hubei (Li Bai’s former residence in Anlu), and Anhui (Anshan and Jingting Mountain) to launch the Li Bai footprint tourism route. Tourists can collect all tourism cooperation routes and unlock a reward package. In Nanchang Changbei Airport, the back of the boarding pass can be used for Lushan tourism promotion, such as scanning the code to listen to English introductions and cultural promotion. This cross-regional collaboration model can achieve resource sharing, tourist interaction, and effectively integrate tourist routes.

6. Conclusion

In the era of in-depth culture-tourism integration, this study, taking English translation of Li Bai’s poems about Lushan as an example, reveals the manifestations of cultural default in the language level, meaning level, and aesthetic level, systematically proposes corresponding compensation strategies, and explores its application path in culture-tourism scenarios such as digital exhibition, cultural experience and cross-regional communication. The research shows that the compensation for cultural default in the English translation of ancient poems about Lushan is not merely a translation task, but a cross-cultural communication activities that take into account both “literary” and “communication”. it aims to attract foreign tourists to visit Lushan Mountain in Jiujiang, and help foreign tourists experience the wisdom and beauty of Chinese poetry while enjoying China’s beautiful scenery, and thus make world cultural heritage like Lushan shine on the international stage.

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