

Original Paper

A Study on the English Translation of Ancient Chinese Poetry and Prose in *The Governance of China IV*—Based on the Analysis of a Small Self-built Parallel Corpus

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Abstract

Based on a small, self-built Chinese-English parallel corpus, this study adopts a qualitative analysis approach to explore the features and English translation methods of ancient Chinese poetry and prose in The Governance of China IV. It is found that ancient Chinese poetry and prose are primarily cited directly from ancient articles. During the translation process, the translator skillfully applies a variety of methods, with a particular emphasis on free translation and its combination with literal translation. Furthermore, the translator flexibly incorporates amplification and omission as needed. This study provides valuable insights and practical methods for translating ancient Chinese poetry and prose in political documents with Chinese characteristics.

Keywords

Chinese-English translation, ancient Chinese poetry and prose, The Governance of China IV

1. Introduction

In the context of globalization, China, as the world's second-largest economy, has increasingly attracted attention from both developed and developing countries for its path, theory, system, and culture. This attention has fueled a surge in translations of *The Governance of China* series (Huang, 2018). The fourth volume of *The Governance of China* contains 109 important works authored by the President of China, encompassing speeches, talks, instructions, and messages of congratulations spanning the period from February 3, 2020, to May 10, 2022 (Han, 2022). The book is rich in citations of ancient Chinese poetry and prose, which are concise in language and profound in philosophy. These citations not only showcase the wisdom embedded in Chinese culture but also embody valuable governance insights. The translation of these ancient Chinese poetry and prose in *The Governance of China* enables the

international community to appreciate the unique charm and profound heritage of Chinese culture, thereby fostering greater understanding of it. Therefore, this study investigates the citations of ancient Chinese poetry and prose and their English translation methods through the establishment of a Chinese-English parallel corpus. The objectives of this study are to address the following research questions: (1) What are the features of the ancient Chinese poetry and prose cited in *The Governance of China IV*, and can they be categorized? (2) How are these ancient Chinese poetry and prose translated into English, and what translation methods are primarily employed?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Translation Studies on *The Governance of China*

Since 2014, *The Governance of China* series and its English editions have successively been published, promptly gaining considerable attention within the translation field. Zhou and He (2023), through a visual analysis of the translation studies literature on *The Governance of China* series indexed in CNKI from 2015 to 2022, have concluded that the research progress in this field can be roughly divided into three phases: the “Emergence Phase” (2015-2016), the “Development Phase” (2017-2020), and the “Maturity Phase” (2021 to present). The research has expanded in the depth and breadth accordingly, not only focusing on the exploration of translation strategies and methods, such as analyzing the principles and strategies of translating political documents (Shi & Zhang, 2021), but also extending to function-oriented studies on overseas dissemination effects and audience acceptance, such as insights into the international dissemination of Chinese political discourse through the translation of titles in *The Governance of China* (Fu & Lan, 2019). Furthermore, applied research related to translation teaching practice has also emerged, such as fostering students’ international communication capabilities through courses appreciating and analyzing the English translations in *The Governance of China* (Tang, 2022). These studies reflect a diversified development trend in this field. Translation studies on *The Governance of China* are of great significance in enhancing the international community’s understanding of China’s policy concepts, promoting cultural exchanges and mutual learning, enhancing national soft power, and advancing the construction of a community with a shared future for mankind.

2.2 Translation Studies on Ancient Chinese Poetry and Prose

Each culture possesses its unique forms of expression, such as China’s distinctive idioms, two-part allegorical sayings, proverbs, ancient Chinese poetry, and ancient Chinese prose, among others. Achieving full equivalence for these cultural elements in the translation is extremely challenging, prompting researchers to delve deeper into these linguistic phenomena. Among them, research on the English translation of ancient Chinese poetry holds a pivotal position in the field of translation studies. Yang and Bao (2009) pointed out that research on the English translation of classical poetry primarily focused on several core domains, including translation practice, translation theory, comparative

analysis of translations, and the translator's linguistic style. The research perspectives mainly manifested in three aspects: "interdisciplinary integration", "the shift from normative to descriptive translation studies", and "the confrontation of modern Western translation theories". Since the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, the President's speeches, articles, and interviews have garnered considerable attention, with a notable reason being his proficiency in quoting classical literature (Zhu, 2022). This phenomenon not only showcases the charm of classical poetry but also demonstrates the unique contemporary value and political implications of traditional cultural elements such as ancient Chinese prose etc.

Wang (2019) argues that the translation of ancient Chinese poetry and prose is challenging due to their refinement and omission of subjects, objects, prepositions, and other components, which necessitates a thorough understanding of the original text by the translator. Furthermore, emphasis on rhyme and distinct aesthetic criteria for the translated texts add to the complexity of the translation process. The use of words with differing meanings in ancient and modern times, as well as polysemy, further complicates the translation. Lastly, in various political documents, it is imperative to convey the political connotations embedded within ancient Chinese poetry and prose. Currently, research on the translation of ancient Chinese poetry and prose within political texts has exhibited diversified perspectives. For instance, Ding (2023) explored English translation strategies for them from the perspective of the three-dimensional transformation theory, while Chang (2019) applied the four-step framework of Steiner's Hermeneutics to translation practice. Additionally, three beauties theory was also frequently utilized in analyzing ancient Chinese poetry and prose. This theory emphasizes the importance of conveying the "beauty of meaning", "beauty of sound", and "beauty of form" of the original texts in translation (Xu, 1984).

3. Research Design

3.1 Data Sources

The research data for this study are sourced from the Chinese and English versions of *The Governance of China IV*. Initially, the author referred to the endnotes in the Chinese version to preliminarily identify the ancient Chinese poetry and prose cited directly. After verification, these citations were compiled in sequence. Subsequently, the author conducted a thorough reading of the book, screening for potential indirect citations of ancient Chinese poetry and prose. Upon consulting relevant materials, these indirect citations were similarly recorded in sequential order. After sorting, a total of 111 citations of both direct and indirect types were identified. Finally, by cross-referencing with the English version of *The Governance of China IV*, the author obtained the corresponding English translations for the Chinese citations, thereby establishing a corpus comprising original ancient Chinese poetry and prose along with their English translations.

3.2 Research Steps

This study conducts an analysis of the textual features of the Chinese-English parallel corpus. The specific steps are as follows: (1) Collect corpora and preprocess the data to construct a parallel corpus in both Chinese and English. (2) Adopt a qualitative research approach to describe, classify, and interpret the features of ancient Chinese poetry and prose and the primary English translation methods. (3) Use Excel to visualize the statistical results.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Features of Ancient Chinese Poetry and Prose

Citation has a long history and extensive application in Chinese rhetoric. Despite the abundance of theoretical research on citation, the academic community has yet to establish a unified classification standard for various types of citations (Zhang& Song, 2009). This study aims to explore the features of ancient Chinese poetry and prose in *The Governance of China IV* based on two dimensions: the methods of citations and sources of the ancient Chinese poetry and prose.

4.1.1 Methods of Citations

Based on the methods of citations, the ancient Chinese poetry and prose in this book can be divided into direct citation and indirect citation (Figure 1).

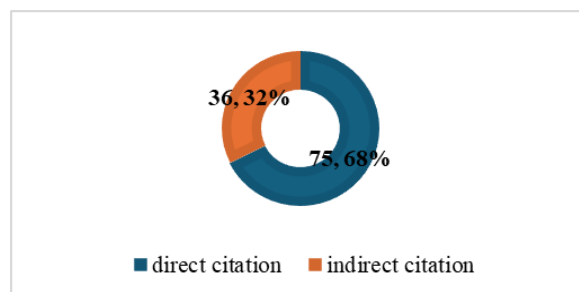


Figure 1. Methods of Citations

The study conducts a statistical analysis of the citations of ancient Chinese poetry and prose in *The Governance of China IV*, identifying a total of 111 citations, with 75 being direct citations, which account for 68% of the total. For instance, the President employed the saying, “A person without virtue has no high aspirations; a person without talent has no keen insights”, to exhort Party cadres at all levels to strengthen their party loyalty and cultivate their party spirit. Among the total of 111 citations, 36 are indirect citations, accounting for 32% of the total. For example, the President emphasized the importance of balancing inheritance and innovation in carrying forward the fine traditional Chinese culture, saying, “by learning from the past but not in a rigid manner, and by innovating but not breaking entirely with the past”.

The study shows that the ancient Chinese poetry and prose in this book are primarily cited directly. These direct citations, which reproduce the original sentences from ancient poems or articles, are typically enclosed in quotation marks and are accompanied by clear sources listed at the end of the text. This makes it easy for readers to trace and verify the citations. On the other hand, indirect citations, which constitute a relatively smaller proportion, integrate the spiritual connotations or specific phrases of ancient Chinese poetry and prose into new contexts without the use of quotation marks, reflecting the subtle influence of excellent traditional Chinese culture on people. This classification, based on the differences in the methods of citations, demonstrates the President's profound understanding and flexible application of traditional culture.

4.1.2 Sources of the Ancient Chinese Poetry and Prose

Based on the sources of the ancient Chinese poetry and prose, they can be tentatively classified into three categories: firstly, poetry; secondly, articles; and thirdly, inscriptions (Figure 2).

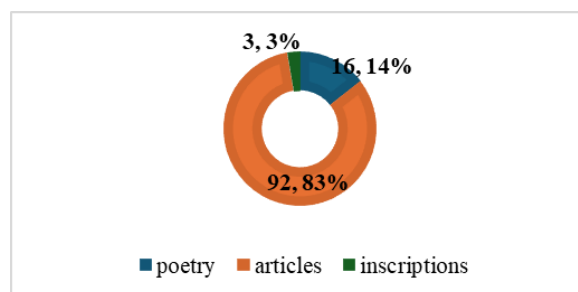


Figure 2. Sources of the Ancient Chinese Poetry and Prose

According to *Ci Hai* (a comprehensive Chinese dictionary), “articles” are defined as organized written texts. Citations from articles refer to the quotation of paragraphs or sentences from ancient articles. Through statistical analysis, such citations total 92, accounting for 83% of the overall. For example, “Just as Heaven maintains vigor through movement, a gentleman makes unremitting efforts to perfect himself”, taken from *The Book of Changes*, exemplifies the noble character of the Chinese nation's perseverance and indomitable spirit.

Zhuang (2018) highlights the emergence of a form of rhymed poetry during the Tang and Song dynasties, which was governed by stringent rules regarding sound, meaning, and form. When citing poetry, scholars typically quote lines or phrases from rhymed poems. In this study, citations from poetry total 16, accounting for 14% of the total citations. For instance, the line from Du Fu's poem, “If only I could build a house with thousands upon thousands of rooms, I would bring all the poor people on the earth under its roof and bring smiles to their faces”, exemplifies the profound aspiration of the Chinese nation to eradicate poverty.

Ci Hai defines “inscriptions” as a method of evaluating a work or expounding upon personal reflections. Citations from inscriptions involve quoting inscriptions or epitaphs from ancient stelae,

paintings, and other works, totaling 3, accounting for 3% of the total. For instance, the sentence “The sea is vast because it embraces many rivers”, originating from Lin Zexu’s inscription (a prominent Qing Dynasty official), is skillfully integrated into the book’s content to illustrate the vast territory of China and the diversified natural conditions and economic situations across its regions.

In summary, this study finds that classifying based on the sources of ancient Chinese poetry and prose reveals the richness of citations in *The Governance of China IV*. Firstly, the high proportion of citations from articles demonstrates the book’s emphasis on drawing wisdom from classic Chinese literature. The inclusion of citations from poetry not only enriches the expressive forms of the text but also showcases the unique charm of Chinese poetry. Lastly, although inscriptions account for a relatively small number, they contain profound philosophical insights and wisdom about life, providing readers with inspiration.

4.2 English Translation of Ancient Chinese Poetry and Prose

This study conducts a proportional analysis of the primary translation methods employed in 111 citations of ancient Chinese poetry and prose (Figure 3).

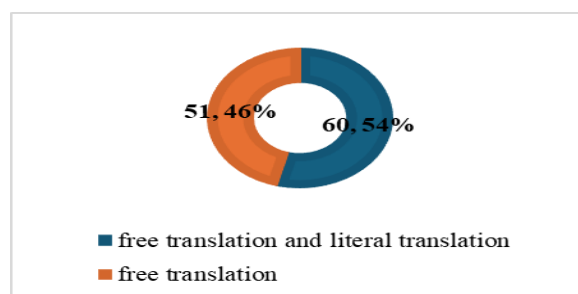


Figure 3. Primary Translation Methods of Ancient Chinese Poetry and Prose

The results indicate that a total of 60 citations, accounting for 54% of the overall total, employ a combination of free translation and literal translation. Additionally, 51 citations, constituting 46% of the total, utilize free translation. Furthermore, this study does not identify any instances where the English translations of ancient Chinese poetry and prose solely rely on literal translation, neglecting the connotations of the original texts.

The study finds that, given the profound cultural connotations and emotions embedded in ancient Chinese poetry and prose, the translation thereof should prioritize the method of free translation to better convey the essence and deep meanings of these texts, which aligns with the pursuit of conveying “beauty of meaning”. However, as the unique literary form, ancient Chinese poetry and prose possess rigorous parallel structures, harmonious rhythmic beauty, and abundant cultural imagery. Therefore, in translation, translators often adopt a combination of free translation and literal translation, striving to retain the “beauty of form” while conveying the content. Additionally, translators skillfully employ amplification or omission based on specific circumstances to ensure the accuracy and fluency of the

translation. Below are relevant case studies exploring these points:

E.g. (1) 要把坚持底线思维、坚持问题导向贯穿工作始终，做到见微知著、防患于未然。

Translation: We must make preparations for worst-case scenarios, focus on solving problems in our work, be sharp and quick in foreseeing and identifying potential threats, and take preventive measures. In this example, “防患于未然” (“take preventive measures”), an indirect citation from the ancient Chinese text *The Book of Changes*, employs a method of free translation. The structure of the original text is sacrificed to preserve its core meaning (Zhu, 2020).

The phrase “防患于未然” (“take preventive measures”) emphasizes the importance of acting to prevent problems or disasters before they manifest. The translation does not adhere rigidly to the formal structure of the original text, nor does it directly translate the core terms “防患” (“prevent dangers”) and “未然” (“before they happen”). Instead, the translator adopts a combination of these words “take”, “preventive”, and “measures”, which express the meaning of taking preventive actions. Incorporating the concept of “见微知著” (“be sharp and quick in foreseeing and identifying potential threats”), the overall translation conveys the idea of taking preventive measures in response to potential threats. It accurately captures the essence of “防患于未然” (“take preventive measures”), while ensuring a natural and fluent English expression.

E.g. (2) 一百年来，中国共产党团结带领中国人民，以“为有牺牲多壮志，敢教日月换新天”的大无畏气概，书写了中华民族几千年历史上最恢宏的史诗。

Translation: Over the past hundred years, the Party has united the Chinese people and led them in writing the most magnificent chapter in the millennia-long history of the Chinese nation, embodying the dauntless spirit that Mao Zedong expressed when he wrote, “Our minds grow stronger for the martyrs’ sacrifice, daring to make the sun and the moon shine in the new sky”.

“为有牺牲多壮志，敢教日月换新天” (“Our minds grow stronger for the martyrs’ sacrifice, daring to make the sun and the moon shine in the new sky”) is a direct citation from Mao Zedong’s poem. A Chinese translator Zhu Weizhi believes that there are no fixed rules to follow in translating poetry, but there is one guiding principle: the integration of literal and free translation (Ouyang, 2013). During the translation process, the translator skillfully combines the methods of free and literal translation to accurately convey the meaning and artistic conception of the original poem, while striving to preserve its form and rhythm.

The literal translation of “为有牺牲多壮志” as “Due to sacrifices, there arise great aspirations”, is accurate in terms of word for word correspondence. However, it may not fully convey the poetic flavor and profound emotional resonance of the original Chinese text within an English-speaking context. Therefore, the translator chooses a free translation, rendering it as “Our minds grow stronger for the martyrs’ sacrifice”, which not only aligns with English idiomatic expressions but also conveys the intended meaning of the poem. Additionally, it clarifies the subject of the “sacrifice”, namely the martyrs. If the translator translate the word “志” (“minds”) into “aspirations”, the meaning of it might

skew towards connotations of goals or ambitions. Considering the historical background of the original poem, the translator opted for “minds”, which signifies willpower or resolve. Through the choice of this vocabulary, the translator not only conveys the basic meaning of the original text, but also further conveys the beauty of the original text in terms of the unyielding spiritual strength of the Communist Party of China, achieving the transmission of “beauty of meaning” in the English context.

“Daring to make the sun and the moon shine in the new sky”. In this translation, the translator combines free translation and literal translation. Among them, “敢” (“daring”) is directly translated as “daring to”, which retains the courage and determination in the verse. “日月” (“sun and the moon”), as symbolic images, are retained and translated as “the sun and the moon”. “新天” (“new sky”) is directly presented as “in the new sky”, and the selection of these words is as close as possible to the literal meaning of the original poem. For the two words “教” (“let”) and “换” (“change”), the translator has carried out free translation in combination with the meaning of the verse. “教” (“let”) is translated as “make”, which reflects the causative meaning; while if the word “换” (“change”) is literally translated, it will cause confusion in understanding (because the sun and the moon cannot directly “change” the sky), so the translator takes the sun and the moon as the subject and translates the word “换” (“change”) as “shine”, such translation not only retains the artistic conception of the original poem, but also avoids the misunderstanding that may be brought by literal translation.

E.g. (3) 今年是党的十八大以来第十个年头，十年磨一剑，党中央……

Translation: Ten years have passed since the 18th CPC National Congress held in 2012. A blacksmith in the past would spend 10 years forging a perfect sword. Likewise, over the past decade, the Central Committee...

In the above example, “十年磨一剑” (“10 years forging a sword”) is an indirect quotation from ancient Chinese poetry, which is written by Jia Dao in the Tang Dynasty. Its English translation is “A blacksmith in the past would spend 10 years forging a perfect sword”. The translator, according to the specific context, makes the translation more definite by adding the meaning implied but not explicitly expressed in the original text.

In Chinese, the expression “十年磨一剑” (“10 years forging a sword”) conveys, in a concise way, the tenacity and perseverance of craftsmen in painstakingly forging a sword over a long period. However, when translating it into English, if it is directly translated as “10 years forging a sword”, although the basic meaning can be conveyed, it is a bit too straightforward and lacks the display of cultural background and specific situations. In that case, the application of amplification becomes particularly important. The English translation, by adding the two phrases “a blacksmith in the past” and “a perfect”, not only clarifies the identity of the subject but also emphasizes that it is a “perfect sword” being forged, thus more vividly reproducing the artistic conception and emotional color of the original text. This amplification technique not only improves the accuracy of the translation but also enhances its readability and literariness.

E.g. (4) 要坚持节约优先。“取之有制、用之有节则裕，取之无制、用之不节则乏。”

Translation: We should give priority to resource conservation. “Utilized with restraint, resources will be abundant; otherwise, they will be scarce”.

In the aforementioned instance, “取之有制、用之有节则裕，取之无制、用之不节则乏。” (“Utilized with restraint, resources will be abundant; otherwise, they will be scarce”.) is a direct quotation from the article written by Zhang Juzheng (a prominent minister during the Ming Dynasty). The translator omitted certain unnecessary words or phrases in the original text according to the expression habits and thinking patterns of the target language, making the translation more concise.

In Chinese, “取” (“obtain”) and “用” (“use”), “制” (“restrict”) and “节” (“save”) can be paired respectively to form new words, which indicates that they are highly relevant in terms of connotative meaning. The semantic criteria for omission in English-Chinese translation proposed by Yang provide guidance for translation learners. One of the key criteria is: “If two juxtaposed words in the English or Chinese original text have the same or similar connotative or conceptual meanings, one of them can be omitted in translation” (Yang, 1999). Guided by this principle, the author notices that in the Chinese original sentence, “取” (“obtain”) and “用” (“use”) are related to the acquisition and use of resources in the context. Therefore, the English translation combines them into one verb “utilized”, which not only retains the core meaning of the original text but also simplifies the sentence structure. Similarly, “制” (“restrict”) and “节” (“save”) refer to the restriction on the use of resources, and the English translation combines them into “restraint”, achieving the effect of being both concise and accurate. Moreover, the original sentence forms a distinct antithesis, emphasizing the two opposite aspects of resource utilization. The translator does not choose to repeatedly translate the antithetical parts. Alternatively, the word “otherwise” is skillfully used for connection, making the sentence smooth.

5. Conclusion

The fourth volume of *The Governance of China* contains many ancient Chinese poetry and prose, which embody profound governance wisdom. Therefore, the study on English translation of ancient Chinese poetry and prose is of great significance for the translation practice of political texts. This study, by combining with corpora, using the qualitative research method and with the help of Excel for visual display, analyzes the features of ancient Chinese poetry and prose in *The Governance of China IV* and their English translation methods. The study shows that in the book, direct citations are mostly used, while indirect citations are often used inadvertently and interspersed in the text, and the sources of ancient Chinese poetry and prose are rich. In translation, the methods of free translation and combining free translation with literal translation are particularly prominent, whereas no instances have been found where only the literal translation method is employed. These findings provide useful references and inspirations for the translation practice of political documents.

However, this study also has certain limitations. Firstly, the scale of the corpora is relatively limited; therefore, future research could include a broader range of examples of ancient Chinese poetry, prose, and their translation versions. Second, the qualitative research method has a certain degree of subjectivity, which may affect the research results. Future research can adopt more diversified research methods and tools, such as introducing machine-learning algorithms for automatic analysis and evaluation, etc., to reduce the interference of human factors. With the continuous improvement of China's international status and the wide spread of Chinese culture, the English translation of ancient Chinese poetry and prose will be increasingly valued. Therefore, translators need to further enhance their research and practice in the English translation of ancient Chinese poetry and prose, to make more significant contributions to advancing the international dissemination and exchange of Chinese culture.

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