

# On the Modes and Features of the Translation of Chinese Poems into Chu Nom in Vietnam

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**Abstract:** *Based on the Chinese classical poetry literature translated by Chu Nom which is the ancient native language of Vietnam, this paper analyzes the three forms of Vietnamese literati's translation of Chinese classical poetry: formal translation, interpretive translation and expansive translation. It is pointed out that these translations are characterized by various genres and distinctive national colors. The translation of Chinese classical poetry by Chu Nom in Vietnam reflected the new changes and localization of Chinese poetry in Vietnam, and showed that Chinese poetry has gone from Vietnamese literati to ordinary people.*

**Keywords:** *Chinese poetry; Chu Nom; Translation*

## 1. Introduction

In the feudal period, Chinese characters were always the official language of Vietnam. Vietnamese history, law and literature were written in Chinese characters. However, the pronunciation of Vietnamese native spoken language and Chinese characters is not the same. Vietnamese learned Chinese characters only for writing, but they still communicated with each other in their native language. Chu Nom was developed on the basis of Chinese characters. In Vietnamese, it was a written record of spoken Vietnamese. There are different opinions on the time of the appearance of Chu Nom. For example, Vietnamese scholar Lian Jiang praised that Chu Nom was produced during the Shixie period[1], while Fan Wenmiao believed that it was after Shixie and before Ruan Quan[2]. Ruan Qiuxiang said in her research: "It is more credible that Chu Nom appeared in the Li and Chen dynasties." [3] However, from the eight words "Po Gan、Tou Ting、Ju Wu、Bian Long" in the Epitaph of the Holy Lady Li, which was built in 1173, it can be seen that the earliest words of Chu Nom were mainly directly borrowed from Chinese character during this period, and the new characters based on the radical parts of the Chinese characters have not yet formed. Therefore, it can be said that this period reflects the embryonic period of the production of Chu Nom. Chu Nom is created according to the pronunciation of Vietnamese pronunciation, which is really in line with Vietnamese spoken pronunciation. Therefore, after the emergence of Chu Nom, Chinese works translated with Chu Nom gradually appeared, which gradually formed a trend with the development of time.

Classical Chinese poetry is the most poetic form with Chinese characteristics. Since Shijing two thousand years ago, classical Chinese poetry has been formed in the form of four character verses, followed by five character poetry, six character poetry, seven character poetry, and miscellaneous character poetry. Finally, in the Tang Dynasty, it was finalized into a poetry with five character four sentences, five character seven sentences, seven character four sentences, and seven character eight sentences. Classical Chinese poetry was translated by Vietnamese literati in their national language, reflecting the spread and acceptance of classical Chinese poetry in Vietnam and showing their love for Chinese poetry.

Classical Chinese poetry has a fixed literary style, especially metrical poetry, which has strict rules on the number of words, lines, metrical patterns, etc. When classical Chinese poetry is translated into other national languages, the form of poetry is generally preserved, otherwise it cannot be said to be translation. When Vietnamese literati translated Chinese traditional classical poetry with Chu Nom, they did not just stay at the level of translation, but realized the transformation of Chinese traditional poetry into the form of Chu Nom at multiple levels.

## 2. The translation of chinese poetry by Cho Nom in vietnam

Due to the lack of historical documents, it is impossible to know when Vietnamese literati began to translate Chinese poetry in Chu Nom. Ruan Guangjun said that the earliest Chinese poetry in Vietnamese literature was stored in The Collection of Hongde Poems in Chu Nom. "Hongde" is the year title of Li Sicheng of the Li Dynasty. Li Sicheng is the emperor of Vietnam with great talent and profound literary skills. Li Sicheng intended to promote the development of literature during his reign. In 1494, Li Sicheng named himself "Marshal" and selected 28 ministers who were known as literature to establish the "Sao Tan Hui". Li Sicheng organized his officials to write poems and compiled the Chinese poem Nine Songs of Qiongyuan. The Collection of Hongde Poems in Chu Nom is also a representative of this period. It mainly contains about 300 poems written in Chu Nom, which mainly express natural scenery, historical figures, self feelings, etc. The existing The Collection of Hongde Poems in Chu Nom is a handwritten copy, which has no title or time for compilation. Although the book excerpts several translated poems of Chinese poetry, it also contains some poems written by literati of the time, such as Li Sicheng.

### 2.1 Formal Translation

This form of translation mainly adopts the direct translation method. When Chinese is translated into other national languages, the basic unit is still "line", which is usually not merged or split at will. In the early, Vietnamese literati translated Chinese poetry into Chu Nom by directly translating. However, in specific translation work, the increase or decrease of line is still common. Due to the similarities between the Chinese and Vietnamese phonetics, some transliterations adopt formal translation to pursue the correspondence of the form and even the phonology of the original poem, so as to maintain the style and features of the original poem as much as possible. For example, Pan Mengming, a translator at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, translated many excerpts of poems in the Tang Dynasty, the Five Dynasties, the Song Dynasty, the Yuan Dynasty, the Ming Dynasty and the Qing Dynasty. He always translates according to the original text and fully respects the original text.

Vietnamese literati's direct translation of Chinese poetry is based on the direct translation of Chinese sentence patterns and words. However, in view of the differences in grammar between China and Vietnam, translators will make minor adjustments to some word orders. The retention of the image of the original poem, preserving the beauty of phonology. The most important thing in direct translation is to determine the specific form of poetry. Generally, the original poetry is composed of five words, seven words, and miscellaneous words, and the mumbling words are also translated into the corresponding poetic style.

For example, Du Fu's famous work Autumn Prosperity was translated by Vietnamese literati:

Ode to Autumn

Du Fu

The pearlike dewdrops wither maples in red dye;  
The Gorge and cliffs of Witch exhale dense fog around.  
Waves of upsurging river seem to storm the sky;  
Dark clouds o'er mountains touch their shadows on the ground.  
Twice full-blown, asters blown off draw tears from the eye;  
Once tied up, lonely boat ties up my heart home-bound.  
Thinking of winter robes being made far and nigh,  
I hear at dusk but nearby washingblocks fast pound.

Ruan Gong's translated poetry in Chu Nom basically corresponds to the original poetry in terms of sentence pattern, but at the same time, it makes certain adjustments to the sentence to conform to the Vietnamese national language expression. There were many Vietnamese literati who directly translated Chinese poetry, such as Cao Tang's Liu Ruan Series of Poems in The Collection of Hongde Poems:

The Chinese version of a famous poem "The goddess misses Liu Ruan in the cave" [4] There are eight sentences in the original poem. The main idea of each sentence is: "Don't worry about your clothes. The dust dream knows that the crane dream is long. In the cave, there is a day of spring silence, and there is no road on earth. Jade sand, jade grass, green streams and flowing peach blossoms are full of fragrance. Xiaolu's lanterns are scattered, and there is no place to visit Liu Lang in this life."

The translation in Chu Nom is as the same Chinese poem will also have different versions. In another form of translation, the sentence patterns of Chu Nom poetry and Chinese poetry are identical,

the number of words is consistent, and the words basically correspond to the original text. However, due to the differences in language and word order between the national languages of China and Vietnam, some words and sentences and word order will also be adjusted in such translation to facilitate understanding.

## 2.2 Interpretive Translation

This kind of translation method can also be called as the addition translation method. Vietnamese literati translated Chinese poetry in a way consistent with the local national rhythm, interpreted the translation, and pursued the literary value of poetry, so as to retain the artistic conception and phonological beauty of the original poetry, and retain the formal beauty of the original poetry as much as possible. For example, the five character poems are translated into seven character poems, such as Du Fu's *Watching the moon on the 17th* translated by Chen Jichang.

### Facing the Moon on the Seventeenth

Du Fu

A night when the autumn moon is still round, a river village, the person old and alone.  
Roll up the curtain, it still shines on a sojourner, it keeps following me as I go with my cane.  
Where its rays shoot, the sunken dragon stirs, its brightness sets sleeping birds into flight often.  
Thatched study by oranges and pomelos, clear and sharp, the glitter of dew is fresh.

Du Fu's poems are five character regular poems, but Chen Jichang added two characters to each sentence, forming a seven character form. Because the words and sentences in Chinese poetry are concise and short, it is difficult to find one-to-one corresponding words in translation, so the way of adding translation allows the translator to express the translation method that is more consistent with the connotation of the original poem in his native language.

## 2.3 Expansive Translation

Expansive translation means that translators translate according to their own understanding of the meaning of poetry. Although the meaning and content of poetry come from Chinese poetry, the translator only borrows the ideas of the original poem, but uses the translated language to recreate in a completely different format. In this form, Vietnamese translators often use the six eight style and double seven six style poetry styles with national characteristics to translate Chinese poetry. For example, Ruan Quan translated Li Bai's "Down from Zhongnan Mountain, when passing the people of Husi Mountain, we stayed and drank together" The original poetry is 14 lines of ancient style and five characters, and Ruan Quan translated it into 14 lines of double seven six eight. Double seven six eight verse has also become the most commonly used form of Ruan Quan's translation of Chinese poetry in Chu Nom.

### Descending from Chungnan Mountain

Li Bai

At dusk I leave the hills behind,  
The moon escorts me all the way.  
Looking back, I see the path wind  
Across the woods so green and gray.  
We come to your cot hand in hand,  
Your lad opens the gate for me.  
Bamboos along the alley stand  
And vines caress my cloak with glee.  
I'm glad to talk and drink good wine  
Together with my hermit friend.  
We sing the songs of wind and pine,  
And stars are set when singings end.  
I'm drunk and you're merry and glad:  
We both forget the world is sad.

Translation that Ruan Quan's translation of Li Bai's poems completely follows the meaning of the original poem in terms of content, but is completely different in terms of sentence structure. This shows the re creation of Vietnamese literati.

### 3. Diversification of translation genres

Most Vietnamese translators try their best to translate in whispers according to the original form of Chinese poetry, so as to try their best to express the flat and oblique patterns of Chinese poetry, and to simulate and express the meaning of Chinese poetry in detail. The translator should not only express the content value of Chinese poetry, but also express its unique art. In some anthologies of Nan Zhen, Chen Chongshan, Chen Zhongjin, and San Tuo, most translators strictly follow the original form and translate according to the standards of five character poetry and seven character regular poetry. However, Vietnam also has many forms of translation that conform to its own national language and aesthetic characteristics.

#### 3.1 Diversification of translation genres

The most intuitionistic feature of the Chinese poetry translated into Vietnamese is its variety of genres. The form of Chinese classical poetry is mainly concentrated in five character poetry and seven character poetry, and the sentence pattern of poetry is arranged neatly. However, the Chinese poetry translated from Chu Nom has not only five character and seven character forms, which are arranged neatly according to the syntax of Chinese poetry, but also six eight and double seven six eight forms. This form completely breaks the neat sentence pattern of Chinese classical poetry and is unique. At the same time, Vietnamese literati also changed some sentence patterns randomly according to the content of the poem and the habits of Vietnamese language, such as the poem Liu Chen and Ruan Zhao Touring the Tiantai. The original poem has eight sentences, each of which contains seven characters

But in the translation of the Vietnamese words, there are only six words in the fifth and sixth sentences, which are particularly prominent in the original text. This reflects the transition of Vietnamese literati from neat seven character to six eight style when they translate Chinese poetry. This formed a variety of forms of translated poetry in Vietnamese Han poetry.

Due to the differences in languages between the two countries, Vietnamese literati adopted different translation forms to conform to the connotation of the original poetry, which formed the characteristics of various forms in Vietnamese translation of Chinese poetry.

#### 3.2 Preserve Vietnamese national characteristics

Double seven six eight style poetry and six eight style poetry is a pure Vietnamese poetry style which is produced and developed within the framework of Vietnamese spoken language, so it has typical Vietnamese national characteristics. In the pronunciation of Vietnamese language, the length of eight sentences in poetry is very beautiful, especially the six and eight even sentence types. But in poetry with a length of more than eight sentences, the sound effect is relatively poor. Because if it is too long, it will be dilatory and boring according to the rhythm of Vietnamese. If it is too short, the long and beautiful rhythm of Vietnamese pronunciation cannot be reflected, because Vietnamese itself has six kinds of pronunciation.

The translators in different times also have differences in choosing the style of translation, which is reflected in the differences in the concept of the times of literature. In the early period of Vietnam, it was generally not chosen to translate Chinese poetry in the six eight style, because the six eight style was originally used to "tell stories" and translate Chinese novel styles, such as the translation of Chinese talent and beauty novels and historical novels, such as Jin Yun Qiao Biography and Yu Jiao Li. But at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, Vietnamese literati translated many Chinese poems with this poetic style. Vietnam's more mature poetic style of Chinese poetry is Double seven six eight poetic style, and has produced a series of more influential poems, such as Pan Huishi's Chanting Songs of Zheng Fu and Pipa Xing. The success of these poetry translations has made Double seven six eight poetic style that is a fixed form of translation, especially the seven character verse and ancient style poetry in the translation of Chinese poetry. However, with the development of the times, the six eight style poetry is more common in the translation of Chinese poetry. The reasons are: on the one hand, it came into being late and has more vitality; On the other hand, its sentence pattern is relatively simple, less rigorous, and suitable for new learners. In addition, the six eight style poetry was also the mainstream form of the creation of muttering poetry at that time, and the translators were more willing to choose a poetry genre that was more familiar and acceptable to ordinary people.

It does not matter what poetic style is used in the translation of Chinese poetry, but whether it is

consistent or not. For example, Zhang Tingyuan believes that when translating Chinese poetry, the translator can maintain the form of the original poetry style, or change it into another poetry style according to the Vietnamese people's habits. The problem is how to best translate all the elements of the original text, so that the content and form of the translation are closely combined. Therefore, this is not a question of the type of translation, but a question of the translator's talent and expertise[5].

#### 4. Conclusion

Vietnamese literati's translation of Chinese classical poetry in Chu Nom shows Vietnamese translators' thinking and efforts. They not only try to translate accurately, but also express cultural exchange and coordination in the process of translation. They express the meaning of Chinese poetry with Vietnamese voice and mood. Vietnamese humanists strive to realize that the translated poems are no different from the original works and have no mistakes, but they can also make Vietnamese resonate when reading the translated poems, so that Vietnamese can more easily accept and remember them. Therefore, they translated three types of Chinese classical poetry to realize the beauty of Chinese classical poetry with the mindset in Vietnamese, As Hu Shixia commented, "In the past, people only wrote Chinese poetry in the 5th century, but now, on the way of creating beauty in poetry, artists still yearn for more new horizons. They combine the two forms of Chinese poetry and the six eight style poetry to create a new form of poetry in the era."[6]

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