

Reception Aesthetics and the Challenges of Poetry Translation: A Systematic Literature Review

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Abstract

This study uses a systematic literature review approach, primarily through the theoretical framework of reception aesthetics, to critically evaluate various translation strategies in poetry. The study's main purpose is to examine the application of existing translation strategies, analyze the role of these strategies in aesthetic and cultural transfer, and identify how these strategies guide the target language readers' participation in the translated text. To this end, this study reviewed 28 relevant articles and identified three research gaps: methodological gaps, knowledge gaps, and experience gaps. Results from this review illustrated that the framework of reception aesthetics, especially the key concepts such as "horizon of expectation," "fusion of horizons," and "appealing structure," are not applied consistently in the existing literature, and most studies are limited, often examining only one or two concepts, lacking a holistic perspective. In addition, most studies fail to effectively include the participation of target readers, resulting in a lack of feedback and evaluation from target language readers; thus, it is not easy to apply the theory to the actual cultural transfer and aesthetic effects. The research also emphasized that studies combining theory and practice need to be further developed. These studies provide a theoretical frame of reference for future relevant research, highlighting what needs to be done to enhance and expand understanding of the artistic aspects of poetry translation and thus suggests ways in which theory and practice might better work together. At the same time, the study also provides new ideas and concrete implementation approaches for comprehensively improving the combination of theory and practice in poetry translation in the future.

Keywords: poetry translation strategies, reception aesthetics, horizon of expectation, fusion of horizons, appealing structure, systematic literature review

1. Introduction

Translating poetry is never easy, the difficulty is not only to go beyond the literal meaning, but also to convey the cultural depth and artistic conception of the source material (Zhang, 2024). The goal of translation is not just to translate words, but also to resonate in the target language, be faithful to the original text, and also have a keen grasp of culture and beauty. Thus, translators need to make careful choices in translation strategy, and at the same time, they should be able to convey cultural background and emotions.

In recent years, translation studies have started to highlight just how important readers are in the whole process, which fits incredibly well with reception aesthetics. Hans Robert Jauss (1987) and Wolfgang Iser (1979) talked about this shift, putting the reader at the center of the experience. In translating poetry, the translator plays a dual role—they're the first reader of the original and the writer of the translated version, guided heavily by their cultural knowledge and artistic insight (Rehail, 2020).

Using a systematic literature review methodology, this study aims to critically evaluate various strategies employed in poetry translation through the lens of reception aesthetics. By examining 28 research studies from 2014 to 2024, this study analyzes the use of translation strategies in poetry and evaluates their effectiveness in conveying language and culture. The goal is to lay a foundation for future research and enhance readers' appreciation of both the original and translated poetry.

2. Theoretical Framework

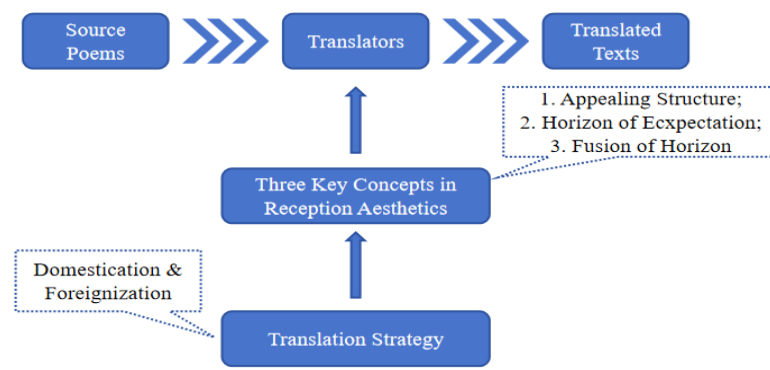


Figure 1. Theoretical framework

Using “reception aesthetics” as a theoretical framework, this paper systematically evaluates translation strategies in 28 research articles by analyzing the three core concepts of “horizon of expectation,” “fusion of horizon,” and “appealing structure.” These concepts not only help identify translation strategies in the literature, but also reveal the key role of target readers in translation reception and significant gaps in current research.

First, in the stage of the original poem, based on Professor Zhu Liyuan’s (2004) interpretation of “appealing structure,” “blanks” usually appear in poetry translation, which are embodied in the following five aspects: rhyme, rhythm, meaning, image, and artistic conception. In the initial understanding of the original poem, the translator will understand and analyze the original poem through these five aspects according to the level of the summoning structure, to lay the foundation for the formation of the preliminary translation draft.

Then, the concept of “horizon of expectation” begins to operate in the translator’s mind. Specifically, this concept affects the translator’s initial understanding of the original poem. As the first reader of the original poem, “horizon of expectation” helps the translator form a draft of the translation. According to the interpretations by Hans Robert Jauss (1982), the “horizon of expectation” consisted of the translator’s cultural literacy, historical background, and their past translation experience. These factors shape translators’ understanding of the original text and influence their translation strategies.

On this basis, “fusion of horizons” is introduced into the translation process. “Fusion of horizons,” proposed by Hans-Georg Gadamer (2013), is described as the translator’s continuous dialogue with the original text during the translation process to ensure that the translated text is consistent with the original text in emotion and artistic conception. This fusion is a faithful reproduction of the original text, which enables the translation to be accepted in the target culture and triggers emotional resonance.

In the transition from the translator to the final translation, specific translation strategies, such as domestication and foreignization, are used to deal with the “appealing structure” in the original poem. In this stage, domestication and foreignization become crucial translation strategies (Venuti, 1995). In domestication, the foreign text is adapted to fit and be appreciated by the intended audience. This process often involves changing cultural features, using the voices familiar to the audience and bridging the distance between the readership and the target text (Al-Haj, 2024). Conversely, foreignization aims to retain linguistic and cultural differences, drawing the reader closer to the original context (Zhang, 2022). In Dong Li’s (2021) expanded framework, foreignizing techniques/methods include calque, borrowing, and literal translation, whereas domesticating techniques/methods encompass generalization, amplification, semantic translation, and transcreation. Dong Li (2021) also introduced neutral techniques such as reduction and descriptive translation for balancing between the source and target cultures.

In the whole translation process, from the interpretation of the original poem to the production of the translated work, the appealing structure provides the translator with an understanding of various dimensions of the text (such as rhythm, image, etc.). The horizon of expectation is the translator’s initial understanding of the text and the draft of the translation, and the fusion of horizons reminds the translator to ensure the consistency of the final translation and the original text in terms of emotion and intention. The way of confirmation can be judged from the five dimensions of the appealing structure. The dynamic interplay of these three core concepts and translation strategies ensures that the translation remains faithful to the original poem while also adapting to the receptive environment of the target culture.

3. Methodology

For this study, a systematic literature review approach was used to structure and integrate existing research findings, adhering to the instructions of Okoli and Schabram (2010), who emphasized the importance of a systematic process to enhance the comprehensiveness and reliability of the literature review.

Literature review has been widely recognized as an independent research method for its scientific nature and value. Snyder (2019) pointed out that a literature review is not only the background or preliminary work of research but also an independent research method, which

can help researchers answer specific research questions and reveal patterns, trends, and gaps in the knowledge field. Systematic literature review specifically lays the groundwork for theory development through gathering and unifying existing studies, circumventing the limitations of singular works. In addition, Liberati et al. (2009) pointed out that systematic reviews, as a research method and process, aim not only to identify and evaluate relevant studies but also to include the process of extracting and analyzing data from them. A systematic review aims to collect all eligible empirical evidence to answer a specific research question or hypothesis through preset inclusion criteria.

The main objective of this study is to explore the current situation of the application of reception aesthetics in the field of poetry translation, and to reveal the research patterns and gaps in this field. To this end, the study took the following systematic steps:

① Literature search and screening: According to the literature review process proposed by Snyder (2019), specific keywords (such as “poetry translation” or “poem translation” and “reception aesthetics”) were set up and comprehensively searched in four databases, namely CNKI, Scopus, Semantic Scholar, and Google Scholar. This search was restricted between the years of 2014 and 2024, which ensures current and timely articles. Ultimately, 28 relevant studies were selected for in-depth analysis based on strict inclusion and exclusion criteria.

② Data extraction and thematic analysis: By analyzing the research objectives, theoretical framework, methodological design, and core findings in the selected studies, the key concepts of reception aesthetics (such as “horizon of expectation,” “fusion of horizon,” and “appealing structure”) are extracted. Thematic analysis is used to summarize the commonalities and differences of translation strategies.

③ Systematic integration and research value: According to the theory of Snyder (2019), this study not only summarizes the core viewpoints of existing literature, but also compares and analyzes the theoretical applicability and practical effects of different studies, forming a new understanding of this field. The literature review method allows researchers to examine the role of reception aesthetics in poetry translation from a macro-perspective and suggests possible research directions in the future.

The value of a systematic literature review approach is that it not only provides comprehensive theoretical support for current research, but also provides clear guidance for future s by identifying research gaps.

4. The Review on Poetry Translation Guided by Reception Aesthetics

By searching CNKI, Scopus, Semantic Scholar, and Google Scholar for keywords (such as “poetry translation strategies” and “reception aesthetics”), a total of 28 pieces of literature were screened from 2014 to 2024. Each study was reviewed in detail. This paper systematically assesses the translation strategies used in this literature. It analyzes the key elements of the translation process from the perspective of reception aesthetics (“horizon of expectation,” “fusion of horizon,” and “appealing structure”). These concepts help identify translation strategies in the literature and reveal the critical role of the target audience in receiving translation.

Wang Ting (2014) studied translator subjectivity in the English translation of Liu Zongyuan's Chinese poem *River Snow* through analyzing rhythm and word choices in two translations. However, the study lacks a clear methodology, thus affecting its transparency. Wang Ting (2014) considered only rhythm and vocabulary while glossing over such elements of reception aesthetics as meaning, rhetorical devices, imagery, and emotion (leading to both methodological and knowledge gaps).

Guided by reception aesthetics, Zhang Jing (2014) compared three Chinese translations of Wallace Stevens's poem *The Snow Man* in terms of imagery, rhythm, and poetic features. However, the research looked at problems but not systematic solutions for cultural metaphors or poetic rhythm, which formed a knowledge gap. The lack of transparency in methodology creates a shallow and lax methodological gap.

In her master's thesis (2014), Yao Na compared two English translations of *The Song of Everlasting Sorrow* through reception aesthetics. However, Yao Na (2014) released four sub-theories of reception aesthetics, which were not interlinked closely enough and, therefore, weakly connected to form a complete theory structure (which reduced the rigor of her research), creating a methodological shortcoming.

Zhang Lei (2014) compared English translations by Lin Yutang and Xu Yuanchong of Li Qingzhao's famous poem *Sheng Sheng Man*. While this comparison presented “Reception Aesthetics” as a keyword for the analysis, the receiving theory was not utilized to describe how readers interpret and perceive the translations. Further, Zhang Lei (2014) suggested the need to choose the best method but did not clarify this method. She did not clearly outline any translation strategies or criteria, which created a methodological gap, compromising analytical rigor.

Wu Chunyu (2015) critiqued Huang Gaoxin's “Three Emulations” method, which focuses on reproducing pauses, character count, and rhyme schemes in poetry translation. Wu Chunyu (2015) pointed out that many readers might struggle to understand these technical elements, but the analysis is incomplete because it does not examine why readers fail to engage with the translations from multiple angles. The focus on rhythm and rhyme while neglecting meaning contributes to a knowledge gap in explaining reader reception issues comprehensively.

Following Liu Liguo and Dong Hongmei (2015), who suggested that the value of a literary work depends heavily on its readers, this article sheds light on Japanese poetry translated into Chinese. While the study suggested various “techniques,” such as domestication, foreignization, and ambiguity to adapt the reader, it does not provide any systematic methodology or empirical evidence to validate these techniques. This process results in a methodological and empirical gap in demonstrating how to engage readers with translated texts and their responses.

Xu Xiaoyi (2015) compared two English translations of *Red Bean Song* from *Dream of the Red Chamber*. The study examined how to preserve aesthetic elements like rhythm, structure, and word choice through reception aesthetics. However, it lacks a systematic methodology and relies on unsystematic qualitative comparison, leading to a methodological gap. Additionally, the absence of reader reception data creates an empirical gap, as there is no evidence to verify if the translations effectively convey the intended aesthetic experience.

Feng Xuying (2016) analyzed the translations of “jade” imagery in Li Bai’s poems using the framework of reception aesthetics, focusing on the horizon of expectation, blanks, and reader role. The comparison involved translations by Xu Yuanchong, Bynner, and Jiang Kanghu. However, Feng Xuying (2016) misuses translation terminology, incorrectly categorizing “literal translation” and “adapted translation” as strategies, leading to a knowledge gap. The actual strategies should be domestication and foreignization (Dong, 2021).

Zhu Hui-fen (2017) compared two English translations of poems from *The Story of the Stone* by Xu Yuanchong, Bynner, and Jiang Kanghu, focusing on aspects like musicality, sense, and poetic flavor using reception aesthetics. However, Zhu Hui-fen (2017) incorrectly categorizes “domestication” as a technique rather than a strategy, leading to a knowledge gap. Additionally, her mixed use of qualitative and quantitative analyses lacks explicit integration, weakening the methodological rigor.

Li (2018) analyzed Kenneth Rexroth’s translation of Chinese classical poetry, focusing on the translator’s subjectivity from a reception aesthetics perspective. The study has two significant gaps: a knowledge gap due to the ambiguous use of terms like “creative translation” without linking them to domestication or foreignization and a methodological gap due to insufficient explanation of how qualitative and quantitative analyses were integrated.

In 2018, Zhou Shanshan focused on analyzing the translation of lyrical poems in *The Story of the Stone* through the lens of reception aesthetics. However, two research gaps are present: the literature review lacks recent sources beyond 2015, indicating a knowledge gap, and the integration of qualitative and quantitative methods lacks systematic discussion, forming a methodological gap.

Sun Rong (2018) analyzed various translations of *Staying Overnight at Jiande River* through the lens of reception aesthetics, examining how translator subjectivity influences the translation. The study reveals two gaps: a knowledge gap due to outdated references (latest citation from 2007), and an evidence gap as the paper inadequately addresses how to objectively evaluate translated poetry in terms of form, rhythm, and artistic conception.

By adopting reception aesthetics, Liu Yuanqi (2018) analyzed the readership of Feng Tang’s translation of *Stray Birds*. There are two gaps in this study: one methodological gap, as the authors did not provide explicit details in the method section, and another a knowledge gap, where the translation strategies used were neither clearly defined nor explained in detail, hindering the systematic analysis of the data.

Chen Yajie and Wang Lai (2020) analyzed three English translations of Du Fu’s poem *Denggao* through reception aesthetics, focusing on aspects of sound, meaning, and emotion. They argued that combining translator subjectivity with reader acceptability offers new insights into poetry translation. However, the study has a knowledge gap because it does not clearly define the “principles of poetry translation” or how to implement them. The article also misses a comparison of different aspects of translator subjectivity, which makes it hard to get a complete picture of the translations’ aesthetic value. Additionally, a methodological gap exists due to the absence of specified methodological tools, affecting the study’s rigor and replicability.

Using reception aesthetics, Zhou Ming-xia and Pan Li-na (2020) reviewed the reproduction of artistic conception in translating Chinese classical poetry. Nevertheless, there are two major gaps: the concept of “reproduction of artistic conception” is vague, and the evaluation system lacks structure, thereby causing a knowledge gap that limits its practical application. Second, the study is not precise about the comparison methods of translation, thus forming a methodological gap.

Huang Fang and Zhang Ke-ren (2021) analyzed three English translations of *Tianwen* from Chu Ci by Xu Yuanchong, Zhuo Zhenying, and Stephen Field, focusing on imagery, rhyme, and form. The authors described their approach as “descriptive evaluation,” which can be interpreted as qualitative analysis because it involves detailed description, interpretation, and data analysis (Pham, 2024). However, they did not explicitly clarify this point, which results in a methodological gap.

Cheng Mengmeng (2021), in her paper titled *Translation of Classical Poetry from the Perspective of Reception Aesthetics—A Case Study of Three Translations of Wang Wei’s “Rural Scene by the Wei River”*, analyzed three English translations of Wang Wei’s poem, highlighting the aesthetic values in different translations from the perspectives of language, imagery, rhythm, and form. However, the article does not specify the methodological tools used in the comparative analysis, which raises concerns about the scientific rigor and replicability of the study, thereby creating a methodological gap.

Zeng Huimin (2022) worked on translating Oster’s humorous children’s poetry and focused on its educational influence for Russian readers. However, the analysis confuses translation techniques and strategies—mistaking “amplification,” which is a technique, for “domestication” or “foreignization,” which are actual strategies. This misunderstanding weakens both the theoretical clarity and practical usefulness of the research.

From a reception aesthetics perspective, Liu Nuohan (2023) compared two English translations of the same classical Chinese poem, *Changgan Xing (Part One)* by Li Bai. Xu’s version attempts to follow the “Three Beauties Theory” strictly, but Pound’s (2003) review is more interpretative and provides a better artistic appreciation for the reader. However, the complete translation of Chinese cultural images and allusion featured in Pound’s version makes it difficult for the target reader to comprehend the spread of emotion in the poem.

Although qualitative analysis was employed, the methodology was poorly delineated, and no empirical research tested reader response; thus, a methodological void remains.

Zhang Yuxin (2023) compared and analyzed two English translations of Du Fu's poetry, one by Xu Yuanchong and the other by Stephen Owen. The study focused on how translator's subjectivity influences the choices and presentation of the translations. However, there is a knowledge gap in the research, as the author mistakenly identifies "free translation" as a translation strategy, whereas it should be regarded as a translation method or technique. This indicates an inaccurate understanding of translation concepts.

Using the theory of reception aesthetics, Qiao (2023) conducted a close reading analysis of Ren Rongrong's Chinese translation regarding vocabulary, syntax, and rhetoric. Qiao (2023) claimed that translators should consider the child reader as their primary audience in translating children's literature and employ both literal and free translation methods. Nevertheless, this study has a methodological gap: it did not test its qualitative assertions with empirical research that can evaluate child readers' receptions and responses, providing an almost complete lack of evidence for the conclusions.

Niu Miaomiao (2023) utilized reception aesthetics to analyze five English translations of *Tian Jing Sha · Qiu*, by Wang Hongyin, Xu Yuanchong, Zhou Fangzhu, Yin Shaodong, and Zhao Yanchun. The study focused on exploring how imagery, language features, and phonetic rhetoric can reproduce the aesthetic structure of the original work. However, a significant limitation of the study is the lack of empirical research to assess the reception and understanding of the translations by their readers, resulting in a methodological gap.

Yushan Cen (2023) used the concept of "blanks" from reception aesthetics to categorize and analyze linguistic, syntactic, imagery, and cultural gaps in the translations of Tao Yuanming's poetry. The study highlighted how translators creatively fill these blanks to evoke an aesthetic response. However, the study lacks empirical research to assess reader responses, creating a empirical gap that limits the practical validation of its findings.

Jing Yun (2023) examined two Chinese translations of Louise Glück's poem *The Wild Iris* using reception aesthetics to explore how translators handled blanks and addressed reader expectations. However, the study lacks empirical methods to evaluate reader responses, relying solely on qualitative analysis, which weakens its support for claims about translation effectiveness.

Zhang Yanfang (2023) analyzed Xu Yuanchong's strategies for translating imagery in Chinese classical poetry, emphasizing literal translation, amplification, and free translation to accommodate target readers and facilitate cultural exchange. However, there is a knowledge gap as the author inconsistently refers to "replacement" and "free translation" as either translation strategies or methods, reflecting a lack of precision in theoretical clarity.

Luo Weixin (2024) explored the application of reception aesthetics in teaching English poetry translation, aiming to enhance students' understanding of the translator's role and the concept of the "implied reader." Still, this understanding is isolated to one aim of research and does not provide specific teaching methods, which results in a knowledge gap between what researchers have studied and what they have implemented.

Sun Di, Zhang Kexin, and Zhou Xinghui (2024) examined the aesthetic translation of Tang poetry into English, using Xu Yuanchong's translations as a case study. The study relied on descriptive and interpretative analysis, but the authors fail to recognize these features of qualitative methodology, leading to methodological gaps.

Yan Yiwen (2024) studied the English translation of imagery in Chinese classical poetry, focusing on methods like literal translation, free translation, and transformation. The inconsistency in distinguishing between translation strategies and methods reveals a knowledge gap, suggesting an unclear understanding of essential translation concepts.

After conducting a detailed analysis of 28 studies on the English translation of imagery in Chinese classical poetry, the primary research gaps have been identified. The findings indicate that these studies commonly exhibit three main types of research gaps: methodological gaps, knowledge gaps, and empirical gaps. To provide a more intuitive representation of the distribution of these research gaps, the following chart has been created.

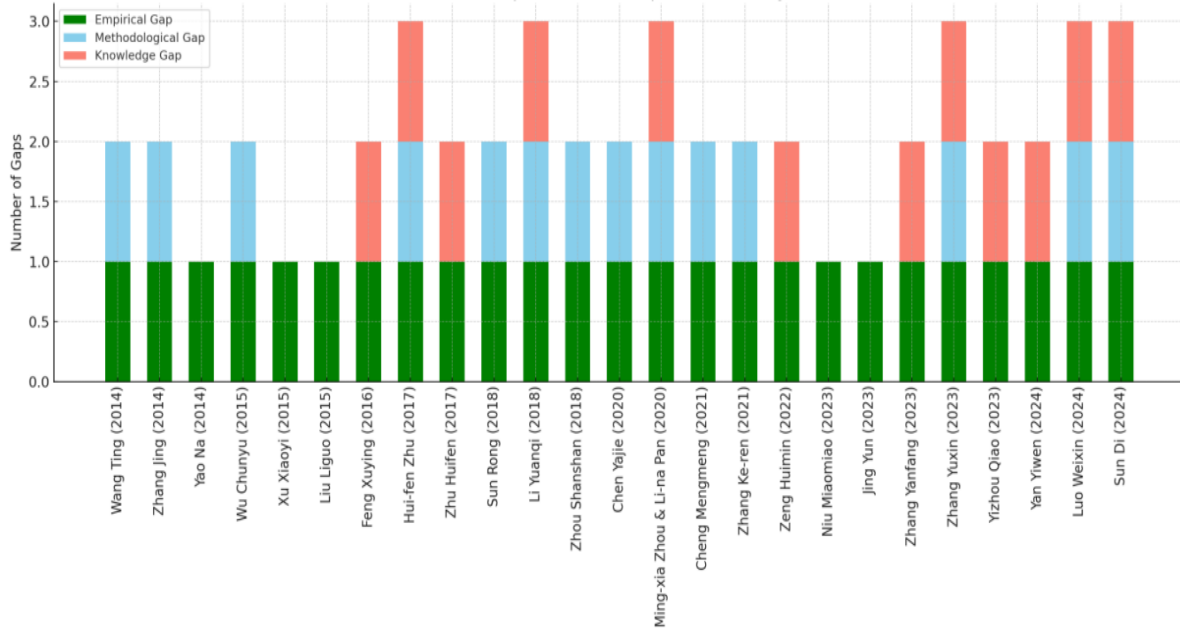


Figure 2. Classification of research gaps

Figure 2 illustrates the distribution of three types of research gaps—empirical, knowledge, and methodological—in 28 articles. Each column represents a piece of literature, with colors denoting the type of gap (green for empirical, red for knowledge, and blue for methodological). It is evident from the figure that empirical gaps are prevalent across much of the literature. For example, while Sun Rong (2018) and Xu Xiaoyi (2015) conducted detailed analyses of classical poetry translation strategies, they needed to incorporate target reader feedback through surveys or interviews, leaving their conclusions without empirical backing. Abbad (2024) revealed that the inclusion of feedback improves practice and has a positive effect in terms of student scoring, which is integrated into learning spaces, such as professional translation training.

In addition, the knowledge gap is also significant. The problems in the identified literature mainly include terminology confusion, lack of theoretical guidance, outdated references, single analysis, lack of theory, and missing information regarding analysis. In terms of terminology confusion, for example, in articles by Feng Xuying (2016), Zhu Fui-fen (2017), Li (2018), Zeng Huimin (2022), Zhang Yuxin (2023), Zhang Yanfang (2023) and Yan Yiwen (2024), the translation terms used are not clear enough, resulting in vague theoretical expressions. Thus, the replicability of the results of the research are affected. Although some studies offered their own translation theories and strategies, they lacked specific implementation steps and application schemes, which makes it challenging to provide adequate guidance for practical translation. The studies by Zhang Jing (2014), Liu Yuanqi (2018), Chen Yajie (2020), Zhou & Pan (2020) and Luo Weixin (2024) and more have this problem.

Outdated cited literature is also one of the knowledge gaps. For example, Sun Rong (2018) and Zhou Shanshan (2018) over-relied on outdated literature in their research. Santini et al. (2018) suggested that references older than five years made indicate the absence of a comprehensive and up-to-date review of the literature. In addition, Wu Chunyu (2015) analyzed poetry only from the rhythm and rhyme point of view and did not mention the other dimensions of poetry translation. Wang Ting (2014) and Zhang Lei (2014) tried to combine the theory of reception aesthetics to analyze poetry translation. Still, the combination of theory and practice was not close, and the lack of detailed discussion on the reception of target readers affected the theory’s explanatory power and application.

Methodological gaps are a common issue among the 28 papers. Researchers often compare the original poems with their translations through description and explanation. For instance, Xu Xiaoyi (2015), Zhu Hui-fen (2017), and Li Yanxia (2018) mainly used literature analysis and text comparison, which aligns with qualitative research methods. However, these studies generally needed more detailed descriptions of their specific methodologies. As Bahishti (2022) emphasized, “methodology is an essential component of the research process...ensuring the reliability and validity of research findings” (p. 1). Thus, an appropriate methodology is crucial for meaningful and accurate research outcomes.

Several studies exhibited multiple research gaps. For instance, Wang Ting (2014) showed weaknesses in integrating reception aesthetics with specific poetry analysis and lacked clear methodological explanations. Liu Yuanqi (2018) does not supply real application guidance to theory and method, thus undermining the practicality of conclusions. Chen Yajie (2020) did not complete definitions and this study lacks practical guidance to distinguish the differences within meanings of original texts from translations without depth and width. Thus, the article can hardly help better understand both aesthetics given the lack of scientific rigor. Likewise, Zhou Ming-xia and Pan Li-na (2020) did not clearly define “artistic conception representation” or provide a detailed framework for evaluating effectiveness, resulting in knowledge and methodological gaps.

5. Visualizing Research Gaps: A Matrix Approach

In the review of 28 articles on poetry translation, three types of research gaps were identified: knowledge gaps, methodological gaps, and empirical gaps. However, a purely textual description can only partially capture the complexities of these concepts and strategies. Thus, a more intuitive summary is needed to showcase how each article applies translation strategies within the reception aesthetics framework and the relationship between different theories and practices. To achieve this goal, the author made a matrix graph to visualize the results (see Figure 3).

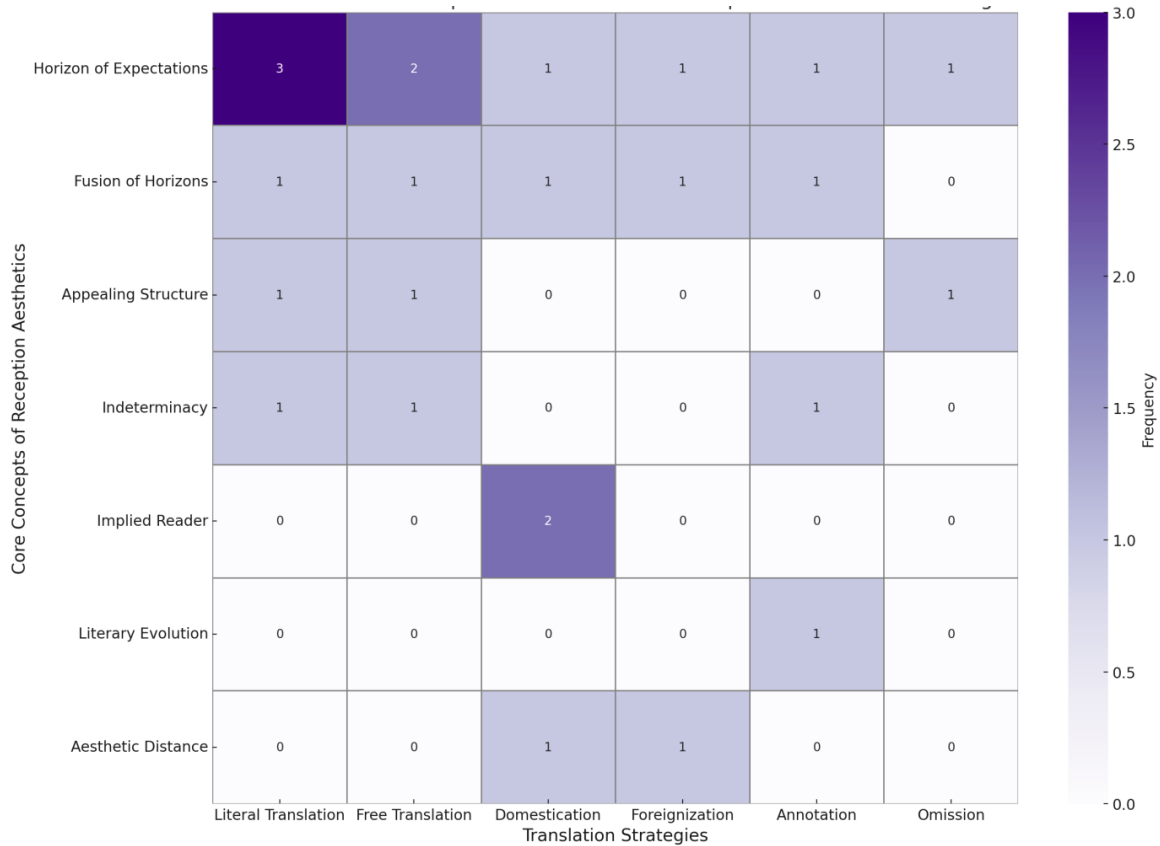


Figure 3. Matrix analysis of key concepts and translation strategies

The vertical axis represents the core concepts of reception aesthetics—“horizon of expectations,” “fusion of horizons,” and “appealing structure.” The horizontal axis includes various translation strategies such as domestication and foreignization. Mapping each study to the corresponding cells in the matrix provides a clearer understanding of each literature’s research focus and its application of translation strategies.

Each cell in the matrix represents the relationship between a core concept and a specific translation strategy. The filled cells indicate where a study has explicitly engaged with both a concept and a strategy, while the empty boxes represent gaps where a given article did not make that connection. These empty boxes help visually highlight the areas that each piece of literature needs to address, indicating missing theoretical discussions or untranslated strategies and helping to identify gaps in the research landscape.

For instance, Zhang Jing’s (2014) analysis of three translations of Wallace Stevens’ *The Snowman* covered several core concepts in reception aesthetics and mentions “zero translation” and “free translation” strategies. Still, the classification of these strategies remains unclear, which points to some ambiguity in the theoretical framework. As a result, this paper appears at several points in the matrix, showing a broad but somewhat unclear approach. The empty cells corresponding to some key translation strategies and concepts also highlight which aspects were not fully addressed by the study.

Similarly, Yan Yiwen and Li Silong’s (2024) study on the English translation of imagery in ancient Chinese poetry focused on target reader feedback, particularly regarding “blanks” in translation. The authors discuss literal translation, free translation, and transformation, which align with domestication, foreignization, and reception aesthetics concepts like “horizon of expectation” and “appealing structure.” The study is placed within matrix cells relevant to these core concepts, emphasizing target reader reception, while the empty boxes indicate areas where the study might have lacked discussion of other potentially relevant concepts or strategies.

The matrix situates each work within the core concepts and translation practices and illustrates similarities and differences across the literature. For example, there is a notable overlap between the concept of “horizon of expectation” and the domestication strategy, suggesting that many studies focus on aligning translations with the cultural expectations of target readers. On the other hand, few studies focus on combining the “appealing structure” with foreignization, which reveals the difficulty of keeping the original cultural essence intact while still guiding the reader’s experience. This deficit highlights a clear need for more research to make translated texts aesthetically engaging without losing the unique cultural elements of the original work. The empty cells in the matrix provide further visual evidence of this gap, pinpointing where existing studies have yet to explore these complex relationships between strategy and cultural resonance fully.

6. Conclusion

A systematic literature review was conducted using an in-depth analysis of 28 poetry translation studies. Three major research gaps in current research were identified: methodological gaps, knowledge gaps, and empirical gaps. The results show that although existing studies have made some progress in selecting translation strategies and the theoretical application of reception aesthetics, most studies lack actual feedback on target readers and systematic verification of translation effects. This lack of empirical support affects the effectiveness and universality of translation strategies in practical applications.

Within the framework of reception aesthetics, the author found that “horizon of expectation,” “fusion of horizon,” and “appealing structure” are three concepts more or less mentioned by researchers, indicating that these three concepts are important concepts affecting the selection of translation strategies. Through the literature analysis, the author found that most studies only use one or two of these concepts, and rarely use the three concepts in a comprehensive combination. This phenomenon shows that in the application of reception aesthetics, researchers still have insufficient overall understanding of these key concepts.

Future studies should pay more attention to the importance of empirical research, especially the introduction of feedback from target readers, to verify whether the translation strategy effectively conveys the original poem's artistic value. At the same time, when selecting and applying translation strategies, researchers need to define their theoretical basis and specific meanings more clearly and provide specific implementation methods to enhance the scientific nature and operability of research. The findings of this study can provide helpful enlightenment for the further exploration of poetry translation and provide reference for subsequent researchers in the combination of theory and practice.

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Authors’ contributions

All authors contributed equally to the conception and design of the study. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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Data sharing statement

No additional data are available.

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