

Original Paper

An Analysis on the Translation of *The Book of Songs* from the Perspective of Translation Aesthetics

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Abstract

The Book of Songs is the first collection of Chinese poems and the representative of Chinese classical culture. It plays an indelible role in the development of Chinese social culture. The Book of Songs not only boasts rhythm in reading, but also has a good effect in meaning expression and rhetoric. Taking the translation of The Book of Songs as an example, this thesis focuses on the study of aesthetic features in Xu Yuanchong's translation from the perspective of Translation Aesthetics, and analyzes the translation aesthetic principles embodied in the translation cases. Poetry translation can be concluded that it not only requires accurate language, but also needs aesthetic features. Therefore, the translator should analyze the aesthetic features of the original poem before translating the poem, namely the beauty of meaning, sound and form. At the same time, the translator should give full play to his creative ability, and seek for the harmony and unity of meaning, sound and form on the basis of the original text, so as to make the translated poem equal to the original poem in aesthetic function.

Keywords

Translation Aesthetics, The Book of Songs, Xu Yuanchong

1. Introduction

As the earliest poetry collection in China, *The Book of Songs* is the glorious starting point of Chinese literature and the first milestone of Chinese realistic literature. Both its ideological and artistic achievements have a lofty position and far-reaching influence in the cultural history of China and even the world. It not only plays an important role in the development of Chinese history, but also makes a great influence on the literary creation of later generations. In *The Book of Songs*, there are mainly four words and some miscellaneous words. The norms are mixed with some randomness, which makes it more attractive. Nowadays, Chinese traditional culture has attracted more and more attention and affection. How to introduce Chinese excellent traditional culture to the world has become the main

problem faced by scholars. Taking the translation of *The Book of Songs* as an example, this paper introduces how to keep the original meaning of ancient Chinese classic poems under the guidance of translation aesthetics, so that foreigners can better understand the unique charm of Chinese excellent traditional culture poems.

The article attempts to apply the theory of translation aesthetics for practice in order to contribute to the development of translation aesthetics theory. By analysis of the English translation of *The Book of Songs*, author also wants to obtain the strategies and methods that can better convey the artistic beauty of the original words to guide the English translation of *The Book of Songs* and other ancient Chinese poems.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Introduction to *The Book of Songs*

The Book of Songs is not only the treasure of Chinese culture, but also plays an important role in world literature. In the history of literature, *The Book of Songs* could be comparable with Homer's epic and Shakespeare's drama. 《诗经》, *The Book of Songs*, the earliest collection of ancient Chinese poetry, collected poems from the early western Zhou dynasty to the middle of the Spring and Autumn and Warring States period (11th to 6th centuries BC). It makes the world understanding social lives in the West Zhou Dynasty from a vivid and comprehensive description, reflecting the historical vicissitudes of slavery society in the unadorned, natural and lively manner. *The Book of Songs* is divided into three parts: folk songs “风”, elegant “雅” and hymns “颂”.

Fu “赋”, Bi “比” and Xing “兴” are the three main rhetorical devices in *The Book of Songs*. Fu(赋): Flat and direct, elaborate and parallel. It is equivalent to today's rhetoric of parallelism. Analogy people or things to the image of the metaphor, so that its characteristics more distinct. “Bi “比” means “metaphor(比喻)”. Xing “兴” starts with other things and then draws forth the mainly content. It has something to do with the content of the poem. The technique of comparison can enhance the vividness of poetry and increase the appeal of charm and image.

“The world is gathering closer together and is sensitive to other countries in ways they never were before” (Bessman, 2002, p. 79). At present, with the increasing frequency of international exchanges and the recognition of Chinese culture by western countries, the number of translations of *The Book of Songs* has reached dozens of countries. Taking the translation of *The Book of Songs* as an example, this paper introduces how to keep the original meaning and style of ancient Chinese classic poems under the guidance of translation aesthetics, so that target readers can better understand and feel the unique charm of Chinese excellent traditional culture poems.

2.2 Introduction of Translation Aesthetic

Translation aesthetics mainly reflects the aesthetic effect of translation studies. Translation and aesthetics have been formally recognized as a field of translation studies since the 1990s. Umberto Eco, an Italy scholar, views translation as identical to culture (Gentlzer, 2004, p. 193). Lambert and Robin

view translation less as an inter-linguistic process and more as an inter-cultural activity (Gentzler, 2004, p. 193). A different culture was consisting with different components, such as religions, ethnics, beauty-appreciation, science, philosophies and so on. Aesthetics belongs to the category of culture. Translation is a kind of intercultural communication, so translation is a kind of aesthetic communication and a kind of aesthetic transformation. Translation aesthetics studies not only the relationship between the translation subject and the translation object, but also how the translator and target readers understand, evaluate and accept the original text and the translation from the aesthetic perspective.

2.2.1 Research Status of Translation Aesthetic

According to relevant literature research, the study of literary translation from the perspective of aesthetics, especially poetry translation, has a history of thousands of years at home and abroad. The term “aesthetics” dates back to the 18th century, and the German esthetician Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten (1714-1762) first explicitly proposed the creation of a new discipline in his book “Aesthetics” (1750) – “Aesthetica” that is, what we call “aesthetics” today. This marks the beginning of aesthetics in the West as an independent discipline.

In foreign countries, from the “beauty of the rhetoric” of the famous philosopher Cicero in ancient Rome, to the British translation theorist Tytler’s the “beauty of faithfulness”, to the translation of the former Soviet translator Levan Gachechiladze’s “beauty of art”. That means “translation is an art, is a special kind of literary form, its unique art of general rules to follow”. We can all find the shadow of aesthetic thought. In 1999, famous American scholars Shirley Chew and Alistair Stead co-authored a book called *Translating Life: Studies in Translational Aesthetics* (1999), it is the first book to systematically describe and study the subject of translation aesthetics abroad (Shirley Chew, Alistair Stead, 1999, p. 137). Besides, Umberto Eco, an Italy scholar, views translation as identical to culture (Gentzler, 2004, p. 193). Lambert and Robin view translation less as an inter-linguistic process and more as an inter-cultural activity. A different culture was consisting with different components, such as religions, ethnics, beauty-appreciation, science, philosophies and so on. Aesthetics belongs to the category of culture. Translation is a kind of intercultural communication, so translation is a kind of aesthetic communication and a kind of aesthetic transformation. Newmark said: “the translation of poetry is almost as old and as flourishing as poetry creation itself.” (Newmark, 2001, p. 185).

In China, aesthetics has penetrated into the major translation theories to varying degrees. For example, Zhi Qian’s “theory of embellishment (文) and nature (质)”, Yan Fu’s “faithfulness, expressiveness and elegance”, Zhu Guangqian’s “translation is art”, and Xu Yuanchong’s “three-beauty theory”, etc. All of those translation theories are rich in aesthetics. In fact, aesthetics has always been the theoretical basis of traditional Chinese translation theory (Mao, 2005, p. 18).

In Mao Ronggui’s book “*Translation Aesthetics* (2005)”, translation aesthetics is defined as: the research object of translation aesthetics is the aesthetic object in translation (original text and translation), the aesthetic subject in translation (translator and reader), the aesthetic activity in

translation, the aesthetic judgment, aesthetic appreciation, aesthetic standards and the creative aesthetic reproduction in translation (Mao, 2005, p. 7). Liu Miqing believes that the theory of translation aesthetics is also based on the translation experience and the aesthetic practice of people.

2.2.2 Translation Aesthetics from Liu Miqing

Translation aesthetics includes aesthetic object, aesthetic subject, aesthetic linguistic axiology, aesthetic consciousness and aesthetic expression. The research of aesthetic object in translation is mainly about language aesthetics, including decoding aesthetic symbol set (aesthetic information in phonetic layer, literal layer, word layer and sentence segment layer) and decoding aesthetic fuzzy set (emotion and aspiration, image and artistic conception, and hypertext implication). The basic attribute of the aesthetic subject of translation is mainly subject to the aesthetic object and the subjective initiative of the translator. The linguistic aesthetic axiology of translation takes multi-dimensional consideration of the value scale and the particularity of linguistic aesthetics. The cognitive schema of aesthetic consciousness in translation includes four aesthetic psychological structures: perception, imagination, understanding and representation. The basic level of aesthetic expression in translation includes two aesthetic principles: expressiveness and engagement, among which engagement also includes three aspects: fashion, adaptability and professionalism.

2.2.2.1 Aesthetic Object

Aesthetic object refers to the objective things that people's aesthetic behavior and feeling. But we need to know that not all things belong to an aesthetic object. Aesthetic object must be an objective thing that is opposite to the aesthetic subject and in the observing relationship of unity of opposites. The aesthetic object refers to an aesthetic object that has an aesthetic value and thus can satisfy a certain aesthetic need of man.

Aesthetic object owns five attributes. First, the aesthetic object is dependent on the aesthetic composition of the source language. During translation process, translators should not separate from the inherent aesthetic elements of the original text and add content that the original text does not have. Second, there will be parallelism between target language and source language in aesthetic effect. Third, the aesthetic object allows the aesthetic subject (translator) to exert his subjective initiative. Then, the aesthetic value of the aesthetic object could be influenced by some specific factors, such as social development and historical environment. At last, the aesthetic value of aesthetic object is hierarchical. That means different types of texts have different levels of aesthetic value.

According to its character, Liu Miqing divides the aesthetic elements of aesthetic objects into two types: formal system and non-formal system. The formal system is divided into aesthetics at phonetic level, aesthetics at lexical level, and aesthetics at syntactic level. The non-formal system is divided into culture, emotion and idea, image and artistic conception, meaning beyond language, etc. The classification of aesthetic object can be shown in the picture below:

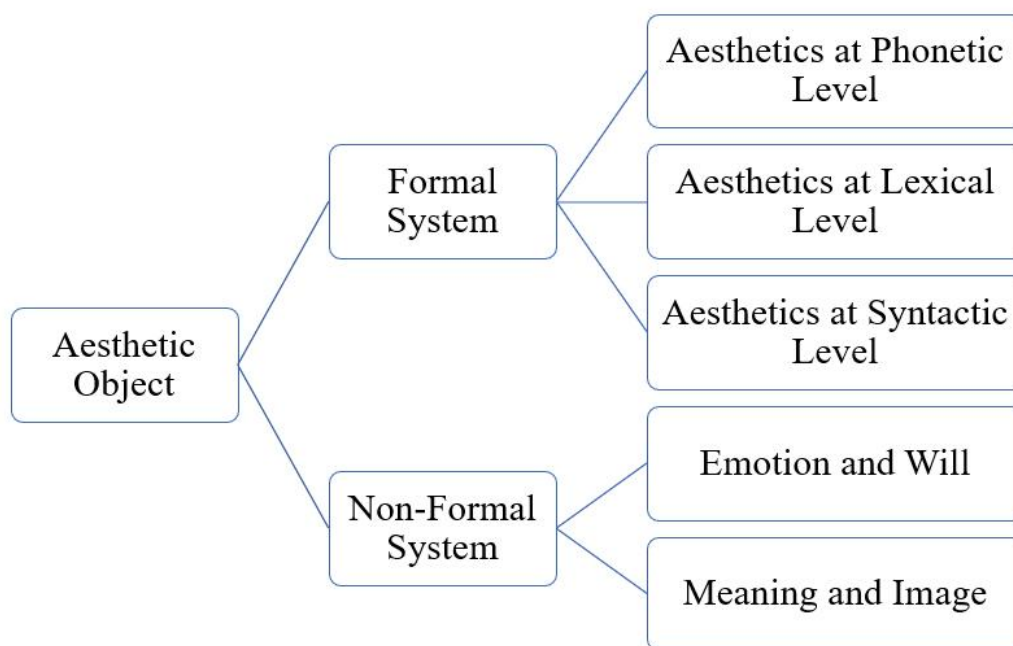


Figure 1. Aesthetic Object

2.2.2.2 Aesthetic Subject

The aesthetic subject refers to translators who carries out aesthetic activities in the process of translation. It has two attributes. On the one hand, the aesthetic subject is subject to the aesthetic object. In translation practice, the aesthetic subject shoulders dual missions: understanding and appreciating the beauty of the original text, and reproducing and creating the beauty of the original text. On the other hand, the aesthetic subject has subjective initiative. Only when the aesthetic subject gives full play to his subjective initiative, the target text can successfully reproduce the aesthetic information in the original text. Thus, the translation can reproduce the artistic charm of the original text.

3. An analysis of English Version of *The Book of Songs* Translated by Xu Yuanchong

Through the analysis of Xu Yuanchong's English translation of *The Book of Songs*, we find that the translator should not only retain the meaning of the original text, but also keep the original rhythm of the poem, as close as possible to the style and artistic conception of the original text, so as to make up for the differences in form and content between English and Chinese.

3.1 Aesthetic Representation in Formal System

3.1.1 Aesthetic Representation at Phonetic Level

Phonetic beauty refers to the degree to which the rhythm and rhyme pattern of the translated poem correspond to the original poem. Ancient poetry is very particular about the rhyme; the translator should try to translate according to the characteristics of the original rhyme. In this way, not only read catchy, but also restores the original beauty of the rhyme, so that the target language readers as if

placed in the original.

Example 1:

ST: 春日迟迟，卉木萋萋。

仓庚喈喈，采芣祁祁。

Xu's Translation: Long, long this spring; Green green the grasses.

Hera orioles sing; See busy lasses. (Xu, 1994, p. 325)

The two lines, which use four consecutive refrains, do a good job of creating a lively and busy scene when the grand army returns from victory, and at the same time, they are rhymed and catchy. For the translation of the first two sentences, Professor Xu Yuanchong kept the sound beauty of the original poem's refrain by repeating the adjectives long and green. The refrain expressed rich emotions in the simplest repetition of the refrain, which reflected the beauty of rhythm, image and rhetoric of the language.

3.1.2 Aesthetic Representation at Lexical Level

Example 2:

ST: 芄兰之支，童子佩觿。

虽则佩觿，能不我知。

Xu Yuanchong's translation: The creepers grow in pairs;

The youth a girdle wears.

What girdle he may wear,

For me he does not care.

“芄兰” refers to a kind of orchid grass, it belongs to herbaceous climber. It is widely distributed in Asia. So we can find this word in English. The translator used the word “creeper”, which means a plant that grows along the ground, up walls, etc., often winding itself around other plants. Although it is not complete convey the original text, but the target reader can know the characters of this plant. So, there is no difficulty in understanding the origin text. It can not only close to the image of the original poem, accurately express the meaning of the original poem, but also reproduce the intention of the original poem author. The reader can experience great physical and mental pleasure when digging the continuous love between them. It can be seen that the Xu's translation conveys the aesthetic information of the original text at the lexical level.

3.1.3 Aesthetic Representation at Syntactic Level

In addition to the beauty of rhyme, *The Book of Songs* also shows incisively and vividly in the aspect of beauty in form, mainly manifested in the concise and concise language and the arrangement or symmetry or random lines. It adopts the structure form of reduplication, and conveys a different kind of emotion and lasting appeal in the repeated singing. In terms of sentence structure, *The Book of Songs* has a large number of four-character poems, each line of which has only two steps. Compared with five-character poems and seven-character poems, the rhythm is more concise and neater.

Example 3:

ST: 秩秩斯干，幽幽南山。

如竹苞矣，如松茂矣。

兄及弟矣，式相好矣，无相犹矣。

Xu's Translation: The stream so clean, mountains so long,

Bamboos so clean, Lush pines so strong.

O brothers dear, do love each other.

Make no scheme here, against your brother (Xu Yuanchong, 1994: 377).

Professor Xu Yuanchong's translated poem, to a large extent, presents the compact beauty of the original four-character style. In addition, when translating the first four lines, he used the structure of "subject +so+ adjective" to respond the symmetrical beauty of the original poem, so as to maximize the similarity between the formal beauty of the translation and the original poem. This shows that professor Xu Yuanchong has a solid foundation in translation aesthetics and his pursuit of translated literature.

3.2 Aesthetic Representation in Non-Formal System

3.2.1 Aesthetic Representation of Image

As an ancient book of China, many words in *The Book of Songs* have its special meaning:

Example 4:

ST: 墓门有梅，有鸛萃止。

Xu's Translation: At burial gate there's jujube tree, on which owl perch all the day long.

The thorn and the owl were both things of evil and were employed here to introduce the evil-doing usurper (Xu, 1994, p. 258).

In this sentence, "Xiao (鸛)" is the owl. It is a metaphor for the wicked. In Chinese culture, the owl is a symbol of bad luck. Anyone who hears the owl's cry will suffer from misfortune. In Greek mythology, owl is the pet of Athena, representing the goddess's wisdom, so there is an English proverb as wise as an owl. Obviously, in Chinese and western cultures, owls are endowed with mixed connotations of praise and criticism. Literal translation without annotation will inevitably lead to misunderstanding of western readers. Professor Xu Yuanchong's literal translation and annotation not only solved this cultural conflict, but also expanded the cognitive environment of the translation readers, which was beneficial to their understanding of Chinese culture.

3.2.1 Aesthetic Representation of Culture

Example 5:

ST: 我心匪鉴，不可以茹。

亦有兄弟，不可以据。

薄言往愬，逢彼之怒。

Xu's Translation: Unlike the brass, Where images pass.

On brothers I Cannot rely.

When I complain, I meet disdain.

"匪鉴" means bronze mirror (青铜镜) in Chinese. In Xu's translation, he translated "匪鉴" into brass.

In ancient China, there isn't glass, so brass is an important material for mirror. Xu's translation can help the target reader to know Chinese history better. From this example, it can be seen that Xu's translation attaches great importance to historical facts, reconstructing poems into history with more preciseness and accuracy. Xu's translation is faithful to the style of the original text and the image of the original poem, and tries to spread the traditional elements of Chinese culture as much as possible, with the purpose of spreading the connotation of culture. The choice of the initial criterion determines the style of the whole translation of *The Book of Songs*.

5. Conclusion

In the translation of poetry, meaning represents its inner soul, which is the core of poetry. But for poetry; sound and form are also an indispensable part of it. Therefore, in the translation of poetry, not only should the translation of the meaning of poetry be in place, but also the aesthetic feeling of sound and form should be maximized to be close to the original work after translation. Therefore, in translation, the translator should be flexible and flexible on the basis of faithful to the original text, so as to make the translation not only faithful to the original text, but also achieve rich rhythm, which makes British and American readers have further and profound feelings for Chinese poetry. Guide readers to appreciate the charm of Chinese classical poetry. Therefore, under the guidance of translation aesthetics, the author analyzes Xu's translation of *The Book of Songs*. In the field of translation aesthetics, the Chinese translator Xu Yuanchong has laid a solid theoretical foundation for us.

The translator is an important link between the original author and the reader. As the link of communication, the translator plays an important role. The author believes that the translator's responsibility is not only internal self-definition, but also social supervision. In particular, the application of translator's mobility, more projects, heavy tasks, but also to strengthen self-discipline and discipline. Translators' internal and external training can produce good translations, which will also help make the translation industry a more standardized industry.

As an old Chinese saying goes: every man has his faults. Because of the limitations of the author's personal ability and knowledge, the understanding of *The Book of Songs* may not be very accurate and thoroughly. Therefore, this paper also has its deficiency.

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