

Original Paper

Comparative Analysis of the English Translations of *Ba Sheng Gan Zhou* from the Perspective of Three Aspects of Beauty

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Abstract

This paper comparatively analyzes four English translations of the Song Ci Ba Sheng Gan Zhou from the perspective of Three Aspects of Beauty created by Xu Yuanchong, which are beauty in sense, beauty in sound and beauty in form. By illustrating the differences, especially the strengths and weaknesses of four English translations, this paper aims at expanding the dimensions of the understanding of the translations of this popular Chinese literary genre in Song Dynasty, discussing the best English translation and carving one academical and theoretical way for the spread of Chinese cultures.

Keywords

Ba Sheng Gan Zhou, three aspects of beauty, Xu Yuanchong, English translation, Song Ci

1. Introduction

Song Ci is a popular Chinese literary genre in the Song Dynasty. It is one of the new styles of poetry compared with the ancient poetry, marking the highest achievement of the Song Dynasty literature. Song Ci is a brilliant pearl on the crown of ancient Chinese literature. Translation itself has a long history and it is a complex and huge task. For it is not only the language transformation, but also the cultural transformation. Therefore, the translation of Song Ci is one glorious and arduous task of spreading Chinese cultures. However, Song Ci contains the feelings of poets and their understandings of lives. Furthermore, Song Ci has its own unique and various rhythms. Consequently, it is tremendously difficult to translate the crystallization of Chinese culture Song Ci into English. So how to translate it and how to analyze and appreciate the translations of it and how to disseminate Chinese cultures to the whole world have been discussed all the time (Huang, 1995).

2. Theoretical Basis

“Three Aspects of Beauty” is developed by Xu Yuanchong (Xu, 2006, p. 113) in the process of sublation of traditional Chinese translation ideas, aiming at illustrating and pursuing the connotations of beauty. “Three Aspects of Beauty” is “beauty in sense, beauty in sound and beauty in form”. “Beauty in sense” requires the beauty of the original works in the translation, and “beauty in form” requires the number of lines and the sentences to be neat, and “beauty in sound” requires the translation to be rhythmic and good-hearing. Xu Yuanchong explained that the three party is not a tripartite confrontation. “Beauty in sense is the most important. Beauty in sound and beauty in form should serve beauty in sense”. As mentioned above, Song Ci is highly unified and condensed in both content and form. The theory of “Three Aspects of Beauty” satisfies the requirements for analyzing the content and form of poetry, and offers a specific reference and clear standard for the poetry translation.

3. Interpretation of *Ba Sheng Gan Zhou*

Liu Yong was influenced by Confucianism and Chinese traditional cultures since childhood. Because of his innate romance and great musical talents, he was welcomed and popular in the geisha house. However, he was humiliated and marginalized by the court and government for writing the folk lyrics. So he wandered around the country and used words, lyrics, especially Song Ci to express his ambitions and his pains and resentments. And *Ba Sheng Gan Zhou* is the classical one of them.

对潇潇暮雨洒江天，一番洗清秋。渐霜风凄紧，关河冷落，残照当楼。是处红衰翠减，
苒苒物华休。唯有长江水，无语东流。

不忍登高临远，望故乡渺邈，归思难收。叹年来踪迹，何事苦淹留？想佳人妆楼颙望，
误几回、天际识归舟。争知我，倚栏杆处，正恁凝愁！

What I am facing is the lonely rain falling from the sky on the river. After the rain washed every scenery in autumn, everything tends to be exceptionally cool and clear. The frost and wind are getting thicker and stronger. Mountains and rivers are left dismal and forgotten. The sunset glances at the building. Flowers are withered everywhere and the green leaves are fallen. All the beautiful scenery gradually fades away. Only the Yangtze River flows silently to the East. I can't bear to climb high and look far away, to overlook the remote home, and to yearn for home. Sighing for years of wandering, I asked why I have been stuck in a foreign land for such a long time. My love must climb the tall buildings on the riverside every day and overlook my return boat. She must want to find the one of mine but she cannot. But how could she know that I am leaning against the railings here so sad and dreadful (Zhou, 2010, pp. 46-48).

The Song Ci portrays a scene in which a lost man missed his home and his wife but he couldn't go back. The poetry itself is moving and touching. And the rhyme of the first part of the poetry is the Chinese pin yin *iu*. The second is *ou*. The poetry is rhythmic and *Ba Sheng Gan Zhou* regulates the form and the style. Therefore, it is fit to analyze and interpret it and its English translations from the perspective of

Three Aspects of Beauty.

4. Interpretation and Comparative Analysis of Four English Translations of *Ba Sheng Gan Zhou*

(1) Evening rain spatters on the river.

Autumn scenes have drenched-look of dripping coat.

A wind, frosty, rise with wanting sunlight.

Strikes o'er hill and river a dismal note.

Everywhere, a bright red becomes dull red.

Leaves turn yellow; and some are even browned

The beauty of nature—fading away.

Only the Yangzi flows on quiet, eastward bound.

I sigh o'er the traces I've left in places.

Why should I have stayed out for so long?

My love must have watched during her toilet—

For each boat—for me—and proved herself wrong.

How could she have known that at those moments—

I was leaning on a railing on my part,

With thousands of feelings tormenting me,

In utter despair, with a heavy heart?

(by Xu Zhongjie)

The English version above is translated by Xu Zhongjie. It has four parts and each part is composed by four lines. It is like the English poetry. Therefore, this version has a perfectly beauty in form. And the last word of the second line and the fourth line of each part has the same sound, which is respectively [əʊt] [aʊnd] [vŋ] [ɑ:rt]. This way the poetry has its own rhythm which is pleasant to hear and read. In other words, this version has a beauty in sound. But what the most important for the translation of the poetry is the meaning. The first line of this version, “Evening rain spatters on the river”, shows the scene of raining but it lacks for the poet himself and his strong emotion when he is facing the cold rain because of the absence of one important character 对 in the translation. The last word of the third line of the third part “toilet” is one mistranslation. 妆楼 means bower which here is used to express poet's imagination that his wife may be overlooking and expecting for his return. So it is a place which is high for looking far into the distance but not for makeup.

In a word, this version has beauty in form and half beauty in sound, but the translation of the meaning of the Chinese Song Ci should be more refined.

(2) I face the pattering rain in the evening sky over the river.

It refreshes the cool autumn at one sweep.

Gradually the frosty wind grows colder and stronger,

The landscape is cheerless and desolate,

The sunset lights up the pavilion.

All the flowers and green leaves have faded.

Gradually the regaling views of nature die out.

Only the waters of the Yangtze River

Silently flow to the east.

I cannot bear to climb high and look far,

For when I gaze towards my hometown, too distant to see,

It is hard to suppress my longing.

Bemoaning my wanderings in recent years,

Why am I stubborn and stay away so long?

I see my beloved staring into the distance vainly seeking

A homeward boat that carries me to her.

How can she know that I am

Leaning against the parapet engrossed in such sorrowful thoughts?

(By Yang Xianyi, Gladys Yang)

The English version above is translated by distinguished scholars and translators Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang. First, this version has two parts and in each part there are nine sentences, almost the same as the original Chinese Song Ci. It has an artistic beauty in form. Nevertheless, as for the sound, this version does not have any rhythm. None of the last words has same vowels. So beauty in sound cannot be found. When we analyze the meanings this version contains and conveys, we find that these eighteen lines perfectly delivers the original meanings. "I face" in the first line demonstrated the strong emotions of the poet. "I see" in the fifteenth line expresses the poet implicit imaginations explicitly and heightens the emotions of missing and painfulness. Even though this version seems to be vernacular, it portrays the real feelings of the poet to the readers.

In a word, this English version translated by Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang has perfect beauty in form and in sense and lacks for the beauty in sound. And it is a work of high quality and acceptance.

(3) Shower by shower

The evening rain besprinkles the sky

Over the river,

Washing cool the autumn air far and nigh.

Gradually frost falls and blows the wind so chill

That few people pass by the hill or rill.
 In fading sunlight is drowned my bower.
 Everywhere the red and the green wither away;
 There's no more splendor of a sunny day.
 Only the waves of River Long
 Silently eastward flow along.

I cannot bear
 To climb high and look far, for to gaze where
 My native land is lost in mist so thick
 Would make my lonely heart homesick.
 I sigh over my roving year by year.
 Why would I hopelessly linger here?
 From her bower my lady fair
 Must gaze with longing eye.
 How oft has she mistaken homebound sails
 On the horizon from mine?
 How could she know that I,
 Leaning upon the rails,
 With sorrow frozen on my face, for her I pine!
 (by Xu Yuanchong)

The English version above is translated by the translation master Xu Yuanchong. First, it is perfectly rhythmic. In the first four lines, the last word of each sentence are respectively “shower” “sky” “river” “nigh”. The first one and the third one have the same vowel [əɪ]. The second one and the fourth one have the same vowel [aɪ]. The last word of the fifth and sixth sentence are “chill” and “rill”, which have the same vowel [ɪl]. And [eɪ] in “away” and “day”, [lɔ:ŋ] in “Long” and “along”, [er] in “bear” and “where”, [θɪk] in “thick” and “homesick”, [ɪər] in “year” and “here”, [aɪ] in “eye” and “I”, [seɪls] in “sails” and “rails”, [aɪn] in “mine” and “pine”. Second, this version has two parts and twenty four sentences. However, the sentences are uneven in length. So it has some beauty in form. But what the most important is the translation of meaning. “长江” should be Yangtze River, but Xu translated it into “River Long”. Surely, “long” and “along” have the same vowel which makes the poetry more rhythmic but the translation of the name of the river is controversial. “萋萋物华休” means every beautiful scenery has withered, but Xu translated it into “There’s no more splendor of a sunny day”. Xu may want to convey that beautiful scenery only belongs to sunny day, but it is contradict with the original sense which is no beautiful scenery in the poet’s heart and mind at all. The last sentence “正恁凝愁” shows us the poet’s depression and despair, and this emotion is related to his fate, his experience and

his dismal future. But Xu translated it into “With sorrow frozen on my face, for her I pine!” All of the poet’s depression is limited to be relative to his “fair lady”. Truly, “away” and “day” have the same vowel, and so do “mine” and “pine”. But the meaning somehow deviates from the original poetry.

In a word, this version has perfect beauty in sound, some beauty in form but less beauty in sense.

(4) The twilight rain sprinkles the river sky,
 A brisk autumn is being washed clear.
 Gradually frost turns sever and wind sharp,
 The passes along the river are desolate,
 A remnant of the sun is just above the tower.
 Here the red has faded and green withered,
 Nature has lost her grace and splendour.
 There’s only the Yangtze River
 Flowing eastward without a word.

How hard to ascend high and look afar!
 My homeland is obscured in vastness
 And my homesickness unbridled.
 I deplore where my footsteps have taken me these years,
 Why should they have so desperately insisted on tarrying here!
 I surmise that my fair one,
 Looking afar from the casement of her bower,
 How many times has taken the coming boats for mine!
 How could she realize
 I am now leaning on the balustrade
 In such condensed heavy sorrow?!

(He Yubin)

The English version above is translated by He Yubin. This version has two parts and there are nine lines in the first part and eleven lines in the second, which is the same with the original Song Ci. Therefore, this version has beauty in form. But, it has no rhythm. As to the sense, the translation version as a whole demonstrates the original meanings basically. What more attracting is anthropomorphic translation of nature. He attributes human feelings to scenery. For example, “Nature has lost her grace and splendour”, here He personalized nature as a girl who lost her grace. “There’s only the Yangtze River flowing eastward without a word”, here He personalized Yangtze River as one silent walker. Personification makes the emotion echo stronger in our minds. But there is one small mistranslation. “清秋” means the cold and chilly autumn but is translated into “brisk” which means fresh and cool. In a word, this version has beauty in form and beauty in sense but without beauty in sound.

The four English translations above have their own merits. Xu Zhongjie's translation has perfectly beauty in form and some beauty in sound but less beauty in sense. Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang's translation has beauty in form and beauty in sense but less beauty in sound. Xu Yuanchong's translation has perfectly beauty in sound and some beauty in form but less beauty in sense. He Yubin's translation has perfectly beauty in sense and beauty in form but less beauty in sound. According to the "Three Aspects of Beauty", what the most important for the translation of poetry is the beauty in sense. Consequently, the best version should be He Yubin's translation.

5. Conclusion

As the paper illustrates above, it is extremely difficult to translate Song Ci into English with beauty in sense, sound and form. So what we should do in the process of translation is to make choices, to choose the most important part for the translation of poetry. And only when the English translation conveys the true meanings of the poetry and the real emotions of the poet could the readers fully understand the Chinese poetry and cultures and even Chinese history and humanity.

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