

Review Article

A Comparative Study of Two English Versions of *Slow, Slow Song* from the Perspective of Translation Aesthetics and Translation Criticism

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Abstract: Chinese traditional poetry represents a part of Chinese traditional culture; poetry can express a long lingering mood with simple words. Although the number of words in Li Qingzhao's "*Slow, Slow Song*" is small, the language expression is very distinctive and full of artistic conception, which attracts many scholars to translate. The translation of "*Slow, Slow Song*" belongs to poetry translation, and different versions have different methods in the process of translation. Translation is not a pure language conversion activity; it reflects the exchange of different cultures. This paper selects two English versions of Xu Yuanchong and Lin Yutang to appreciate them from the perspective of aesthetics. At the same time, in the pursuit of beauty, there is no lack of aesthetic sense in the English translation of Chinese classical words. Therefore, this paper will make a dialectical comparative analysis of "*Slow, Slow Song*" from the perspectives of translation aesthetics and translation criticism. With the continuous exchange and development of Chinese and Western cultures, translation, as an important way of cultural communication, is also developing and improving. Translation theories are constantly emerging. As a treasure of ancient Chinese culture, the translation of words is an important part of cultural exchange between China and the West. How to better show the charm of Chinese culture to the world, so that scholars from all over the world can better understand the treasures of Chinese culture, which is the goal and criterion that the translator pursues when translating poetry.

Keywords: translation aesthetics; skopos theory; translation criticism.

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INTRODUCTION

The background of translating poetry is closely related to the translator's living background. Lin Yutang was born in a Christian pastor's family and received Christian cultural education in University [1]. With his dual cultural identity and background, he interprets China and the responsibilities of Chinese people from the perspective of Westerners. To a certain extent, the purpose of his translation is to show Chinese poetry works in the way that Westerners understand them. Xu Yuanchong is an authentic Chinese. He has a high insight into the knowledge of the East and the West. He is free to gallop between Chinese and English. He aims to spread Chinese culture and information and promote cross-cultural communication. As a Chinese scholar, Xu Yuanchong introduced Chinese culture to the West and even the whole world to promote cultural exchanges[2].

Skopos Theory

Skopostheory is a relatively new model of translation theory, which was developed by Han Vermeer, a German translation theorist the developed model of translation theory is basically an external

study of translation, which focuses on the choice of various purposes in the process of translation. Therefore, it can undoubtedly make up for the shortcomings of traditional translation studies, and thus add a new perspective to the multi-disciplinary exploration of translation[3].

Seen from the target-oriented perspective, Skopostheory boasts itself of one of the deconstructive translation studies, which focuses on the target-text's function and practicability. Skopostheory hold that translating is a purposeful communicative human activity. Skopos rule is the primary one of the four rules that includes skopos rule, coherence rule, fidelity rule and loyalty [4].

As a deconstructive translation perspective, skopos theory provides a new macro cognitive model for translation studies and plays a positive role in overcoming the pure text cognitive model. Skopos theory highlights the role and influence of the participants of translation activities, especially the initiators of translation activities, in the whole process of translation, and promotes the active participation of

the translator as the translation subject. It tries to coordinate the cultural function of translation and the macro restrictive effect and mechanism of the target culture on translation activities, breaks through the frame of equivalence translation theory or equivalence translation theory, puts translation into the category of cross-cultural communication, and broadens the vision of translation studies [5].

Translation Aesthetics

In 1750, Baumgarten, a German Enlightenment thinker and philosopher, first proposed the creation of "Aesthetic" in his book *Aesthetics*. The original meaning of aesthetics is to study human sensibility. Sensibility, also known as feeling, refers to people's feeling, emotion, imagination, fantasy, intuition and other activities. Aesthetics and art are closely connected with these perceptual activities. The research object of translation aesthetics is the aesthetic object (the original text and the translation), the aesthetic subject (the translator and the reader), the aesthetic activity, the aesthetic judgment, the aesthetic appreciation, the aesthetic standard and the creative aesthetic reappearance in the process of translation. While Chinese culture is moving in the direction of vagueness, obscurity and totality, western culture is moving in the direction of accuracy and concreteness. "Fuzziness, obscurity and totality" indicates the disappearance of logic, but the artistic conception is open-minded, the rationality is invisible, and the literary grace is brilliant. Translators are pursuing this kind of translation aesthetics in translation, such as Xu Yuanchong's "seeking truth is low requirement, seeking beauty is high requirement", "Three Beauties" (beauty of meaning, sound and form), Yan Fu's "faithfulness, expressiveness and elegance", Qian Zhongshu's "transformation" and so on. Chinese poetry expresses profound meaning in short language, and it also needs the interpretation of beauty in translation, which is in line with Xu Yuanchong's theory of "Three Beauties [6]".

A comparative study of two English versions of *Slow, Slow Song* from the perspective of translation aesthetics

Aesthetics is perfectly embodied in poetry. "Beauty of meaning" reproduces the beauty of artistic conception of the original text; "beauty of sound" refers to the translation conforms to the rhythm and rhyme of the original text; "beauty of form" mainly refers to whether the number of lines, segmentation and rhyme of the translated text are consistent or coordinated with the number of lines of the original text. This paper will analyze Xu Yuanchong's and Lin Yutang's aesthetic translation of *Slow, Slow Song* from three aspects of aesthetic beauty: meaning, form and sound. Poetry translation should not only convey the beauty of the original poem, but also convey its beauty of sound and form as far as possible. As the saying goes: "the beauty

of meaning is to feel the heart; the beauty of sound is to feel the ear; the beauty of form is to feel the eye [7]."

Beauty of Meaning

Poetry always melts feelings into images. With the help of imagination across time and space, it makes its situation and image have a three-dimensional sense, and sets off the aesthetic effect of conveying spirit and meaning. Artistic conception is the soul of poetry, and grasping it is the key to translation. The artistic conception of poetry often lies in its rhyme, rhythm and form, and the readers' feeling for the beauty of meaning often comes from his understanding of the beauty of sound and form.

The most important thing in translating Chinese poetry is to convey what the author wants to say but does not say, and to endow it with aesthetic feeling. First of all, as far as the title is concerned, Xu Yuanchong translated the title as "*Slow, slow song*". The superposition of the two adjectives expressed the original tone of silence and desolation, showing the style of contempt and full of sadness [9]. Song, also shows the scene that the poet sings softly and slowly. Lin Yutang's translation of "Forlorn ('abandoned, lonely, solitude')") gives title, which has no special meaning, an emotional color, and sets a sad and lonely tone for the word. At the same time, it shows Li Qingzhao's lonely state when she wrote the word. It not only shows the loneliness of human beings, but also expresses the desolation and loneliness of the author's life.

Xu Yuanchong translated "乍暖还寒时候，最难将息" in Chinese into "How hard is it, to keep me fit in this lining cold!" The usage of "lingering" is very appropriate and vivid. The original meaning of "lingering" is a state of "continue to stay and linger". With this word, we can reflect the author's sad mentality and vividly express the artistic conception of "warm at first but cold at last". He translated "三杯两盏淡酒" in Chinese into "by cup on cup, of wine so dry". "三杯两盏" does not exactly refer to three or two cups of wine. The author uses uncertain numerals to express the meaning of wine, but also can't understand the author's sadness. So Xu Yuanchong's "cup on cup" is very vivid, which makes it easy for foreign readers to understand.

At the beginning of "*Slow, slow song*", Lin Yutang imitates the original text and uses seven so and seven adjectives beginning with D to form an alliance, which echoes the rhyme of Li Qingzhao's original poem. The seven adjectives—"dim, dark, dense, dull, damp, dank, dead" show the artistic conception of the poem from different angles, which can be understood as "dim and dark" feeling the sun set; "dense and dull" seem to make readers see the poet's empty and lost eyes; "damp and dank" go directly to the poet's heart,

attracting readers' deep sympathy; a "dead" is the poet's despair, helplessness and depression. On the other hand, in translating "梧桐更兼细雨，到黄昏，点点滴滴" to "And the drizzle on the Kola nut/Keeps on droning/Pit-a-pat, Pit-a-pat", the translator uses the onomatopoeia words-"bits and pieces" to express the voice and vivid image of rain falling on leaves.

Beauty of Sound

The rhyme in poetry is an important factor of sound beauty. "Rhyme" can make poetry rhythm produce auditory aesthetic satisfaction. Chinese poetry strives for the harmony of tones, cadence, and neat antithesis, including rhyme at the end, two tones, and repetition. It is true that there is no tonal tone in English poetry, so it is difficult to copy and reproduce the rhythm of the original poetry. However, English poetry has its own beauty in rhythm and rhyme. Rhythm has iambic case, and rhyme has alliteration, ending rhyme, middle rhyme, vowel rhyme, consonant rhyme, inverted rhyme and so on. A typical phonological feature of Yuandiao is called "the unique song of reduplication". At the beginning, there are 14 reduplication and the sound of the teeth and tongue is interlaced, which are intertwined with each other. However, the use of reduplication in translation cannot achieve phonetic equivalence, but translators give full play to their subjective initiative and creativity, and try to embody the beauty of the original tone.

Different rules of rhyme and rhythm in English and Chinese poetry make it difficult to copy or reproduce the rhyme of the original poetry in translation. In order to make the readers realize the aesthetic appreciation and perception of the sound, the translator is required to transform the text into a way that the readers can understand.

There are seven groups of reduplicated words at the beginning of "*Slow, slow song*". Although there is no word of sorrow, it lays the tone of the whole text. Xu Yuanchong translated "寻寻觅觅冷冷清清凄凄惨惨戚戚" into "I look for what I miss/I know not what it is/I feel so sad, so drear/so lonely, without cheer." His translation adopts AABB rhyme, which is very skillful in pronunciation. On the other hand, the rhyme of Xu Yuanchong's translation is obvious, which is also reflected in the final rhyme. For example, "miss-is, sad-dread, it-fit, up-cup, dry-I, drift-swift, alas-pass, flowers-showers, now-how, quicken-thicken, drizzles-grizzles, grief-brief, cold-old"

Lin Yutang translated "寻寻觅觅冷冷清清凄凄惨惨戚戚" into "so dim./so dark/so dense, so dull/so damp, so dank/so dead!" It uses parallelism and alliteration rules in English poetry. It starts with "so" and the seven monosyllabic adjectives start with the letter D. the feeling becomes stronger and stronger, and ends with "dead", which achieves the emotional

sublimation. Read a strong sense of rhythm of a series of "s" sound, the voice of women' pain and helplessness and heartrending despair performance incisively and vividly, so careful and natural use of voice to express emotions, voice tone and all the inner feelings expressed in a harmonious and perfect combination. On the other hand, in the fifth line are: fallen, flowers, fall. In addition, the onomatopoeia in the seventh line: "pit-a-pat, pit-a-pat" are alliterated and catchy.

The two versions have a strong sense of rhythm, close to the original, and fully show the artistic conception of the original, which is also convenient for readers to accept and understand.

Beauty of Form

Due to the differences between the two languages and different ways of expression, it is difficult to achieve formal symmetry in the translation of Chinese poetry. When Chinese poetry is translated into English, it should also conform to the English expression structure, and English poetry rhyme can be used. It can also be in accordance with the form of the original text, which is consistent with the form of the original text, but it cannot be expressed in Chinese and in English, which will be neither nondescript nor artistic beauty of poetry translation. In English-Chinese translation, short sentences to short sentences, long sentences to long sentences, and questions to questions are generally adopted, which are similar to the original poem in form. This is reflected in both Xu Yuanchong's and Lin Yutang's translations.

In *Slow, slow song*, Xu Yuanchong used the same sentence pattern: "I...what..." and pressed "I" rhyme in his translation of the first seven pairs of reduplicated words. He also used the repeated sentence pattern "so... so... so..." to correspond to the original word. In his translation of this poem, Xu Yuanchong adopted the method of adding some subject predicates to fully meet the needs of English readers and more in line with the English way of expression.

Xu Yuanchong translated the title as *slow, slow song* is also surprisingly similar to the name of the poem in the number of words and tone. *Slow* corresponds to "慢", presents AAB mode, and shows "beauty of form".

Lin Yutang's translation is well intentioned in form. At the beginning of the poem, the adjectives starting with seven *so* and seven *D* are translated to form a parallelism sentence pattern, and the mood becomes stronger and stronger. Finally, the mood is sublimated by ending with "*dead*". It is not difficult for the target readers to realize the formal features of the original works that the original readers can feel.

The absence of aesthetic feeling in English versions of Chinese classical words

The Lack of the Beauty of Simplicity

When Xu Yuanchong translated the beginning words, he focused on making the readers imagine with Chinese characteristics. Lin Yutang pays more attention to creating the scene of artistic conception, which is convenient for readers to understand directly and reduce speculation. But at the beginning of *Slow, slow song*, there are seven pairs of reduplicated words: “寻寻觅觅，冷冷清清，凄凄惨惨戚戚” He translated it into “I look for what I miss / I know not what it is I feel so sad, so dry, and so lonely, without cheer.” Although it conveys the deep connotation of the poem and has a certain phonological beauty, it seems that the translator's involvement is too much, the explanation is more than literal translation, and some charm of the original text is lost. Moreover, compared with the original text, it also loses the beauty of simplicity of the original text in skillfully expressing emotions.

The Lack of the Beauty of Profound

For “梧桐树” in Chinese, Xu Yuanchong translated it into “on parasol-trees a fine rain drizzle.” While Lin Yutang translated it into “and the drizzle on the cola nut/keeping on droning.” In China, this kind of tree has a deep cultural connotation. Wutong, a married couple very much in love, will never change until death. Under this cultural background, in the specific context of this word, “Wutong is more drizzle” can better set off the sadness of the poets. After translation, without the unique understanding of these cultural backgrounds, it is difficult to deeply appreciate the profound beauty of the artistic conception in the text.

For “雁过也，正伤心，却是旧时相识” in Chinese, Xu Yuanchong translated it into “It breaks my heart, alas! To see the wild geese pass, for they are my acquaintances of old.” While Lin Yutang translated it into “I recognize the geese flying overhead: My old friends, Bring not the old memories back! Wild geese pass over head/That they are familiar. Lets it more lamentable yet!” It is not particularly appropriate for Lin Yutang to use the word geese in his translation. Geese means “goose” in English, which is quite different from wild goose. Wild goose is considered as a symbol of information transmission. “Geese” can be called “futile search”. Other cultures cannot understand this meaning accurately. In addition, apart from the differences in extended meaning, “wild geese” is not convenient for Western readers to understand the deep meaning about Li Qingzhao's poem.

The Lack of the Beauty of Smart

For “乍暖还寒时候，最难将息” in Chinese, Xu Yuanchong translated it into “How hard is it to keep me fit in this lingering cold!” These two sentences show that the weather at that time was changeable and the

temperature changed rapidly, which brought great difficulties to the increase and decrease of people's clothing. Xu Yuanchong's translation is more appropriate to the vernacular understanding of the word, but it lacks artistic conception and is too straightforward. Although the word “lingering” uses the personification method to have an intuitive understanding of the weather, it does not reflect the sudden change of warm and cold. On the other hand, in Xu Yuanchong's translation, from the beginning to the end of the translation, there are basically strict two lines and one rhyme, miss and is, drear and cheer, it and fit, up now and how, drizzles and grizzles, grief and belief at the end of the sentence. The neat two lines and one rhyme from the beginning to the end lose the beauty of the word itself. While Lin Yutang translated it into “The weather, now warm, now cold, Makes it harder than ever to forget!” With now, reflects the state from time to time, a casual change. But then “makes it harder. Than ever to forget!” makes the reader unable to connect with the original thought in understanding.

CONCLUSION

Nida once said that he is “proficient in the mother tongue and the source language, understands the cultural differences between the target language and the source language”, and shows his unique artistic creativity in his translation. Lin Yutang's translation reflects the contradiction of his special identity as a Chinese translator with Western characteristics. He communicated his ideas in a simple and clear way. Xu Yuanchong understands the cultural differences between the target language and the source language, and in order to facilitate cultural exchange, he adopts a plain description but more profound artistic conception to attract readers.

Through the analysis of the above translation examples, due to the different translation purposes, the two translators have made different translations of Li Qingzhao's *Slow, slow song*. The purpose of translation, to a great extent, influences the translator's pursuit and requirements of his own translation. The correct understanding and accurate positioning of poetry can make the translation express the poet's life situation at that time, and can also dialysis the poet's inner activities, emotional state and emotional ups and downs. Correct translation can eliminate the distortion of understanding caused by cultural differences, better show the Chinese culture to the world, and promote international cultural exchanges. The correct translation of poetry also provides valuable translation materials for contemporary college students. College students are learning to understand Chinese and grasp the meaning of English, and seriously study the correct translation methods involved, so as to better cultivate their sentiment and improve their ability to use Chinese and English.

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