

Xu Yuanchong's image translation of Chinese Poems through Cross-cultural perspective

Mengqi Gao*, Yumei Ma

School of Foreign Languages, Henan University of Technology, Zhengzhou 450001, China

Abstract: Chinese classical poetry is the treasure of literary translation, and image is the soul of poetry. Poetry translation is the difficulty of literary translation. Images of poetry contain rich cultural connotation, which increases the difficulty of poetry translation. Nowadays intercultural communication becomes more and more important with the tendency of globalization, the focus of translation studies transfer to culture from language. Cultural relativism holds that intercultural communication includes assimilating the external culture and exporting local culture. Because image contains abundant culture, the image translation effects the readers' understanding of the original work directly. As a master of poetry translation, Xu Yuanchong's translation provides new perspective and new ideas for the translation of image. From the intercultural perspective, the definition and relationship of culture and translation is discussed, the image of poetry translation is classified and integrated, and the translation strategies of image is explored based on the poetry translation of Xu Yuanchong. This thesis aims to find a basic rule of image translation of Chinese classical poetry.

Keywords: Poetry translation, image, Xu Yuanchong.

I. INTRODUCTION

The mutual understanding among the nations of the world is hindered, not only because of language diversity, but also because of the different thinking modes, that is to say, people's knowledge source and differences in ways of thinking cause the understanding obstacle. Translation is an intercultural communication activity, which makes translator use target language to externalize the cultural world of source language consciously. Zhang Peiji held that translation is a language activity which through a language to express another language's conceptual work accurately. Yang zijian point that translation is translators' special and complex thinking activity process. Wang gaosheng regarded translation as translator use target language to think again to the conceptual work of source language. Huang zhonglian held that translation is a thinking activity and language activity which translator transfer the source language cultural information to the target language cultural information to meet readers' special needs. Peng lin point that translation is a cross-language and intercultural thinking activity.

The image of poetry is an important pattern of manifestation of poetic beauty, and the image translation effect the beauty transmission of original poem. The most interesting thing is the image of poetry in poetry translation. In poems, everything is

filled with new life and inspiration, poets express their feelings through scenery description. From "Book of Songs" to Lisao, and to Tang and Song poems, the poetic change reflects the change of time. While the image of poetry also records the characteristics of Chinese cultural aesthetics. Chinese and Western image translation art has their own profound historical origin and cultural connotation, and they have many similarities and differences on practice and theory, which not only provides foundation to image translation, but also sets many obstacles objectively. Image is the concentrated reflection of poetry nature, and there is no poetry nature in poem without image. Every image's structure is multi-layered regardless of simple or complex. Xu Yuanchong is a outstanding representative among Chinese modern translators, he translated a lot of Chinese classical poetry, made great contribution to the spread of Chinese culture, and improve Chinese literary position in the world [1,2].

In English, culture is derived from Latin--cultura, its earliest basic meaning is planting, later with the development of social civilization, its connotation and extension become more abundant. Culture is a complex, including material object, knowledge, belief, art, moral, law, custom and other social competence and habits [3-5]. Traditionally, culture is combination of material wealth and spiritual wealth created by human beings in the process of society historical development. Culture is produced with the production

of language. Language is the premise of cultural formation and development, and it is the carrier of culture, both of them cannot exist independently. Usually culture is a kind of language activity. It is the bridge of different languages communication in the process of human communication thinking, it expresses the information of source language through the information of target language, translation makes readers get the idea of original author, and the similar feeling of source language readers [6-9]. Translation and culture closely connection based on the interdependent web of language and culture. In 1980s, Susan Bassnet put forward translation is the communication of internal culture and different cultures. Translation equivalence is the equivalence of source and target language in terms of cultural function.

In poems, image is a special concept, it can be called "traditional image", "fixed image", and "allusive image". Image cannot be felt directly, it needs thinking and memory to arouse individual psychological thoughts, it can be modified by descriptive adjective [10]. In literary image, once some art or artistic images are adopted successfully, other authors can utilize this these images. In poetry, image is given the author's feeling, is the carrier of author's thinking and emotion. There are realistic narrative poems and lyric poetry, and image is divided into real image and virtual image. Real image is a material which can be seen, and virtual image is a kind of feeling or ideas of author. Image includes individual subjective feeling. In literary works, image cannot be showed independent, it depends on external objects. In Chinese poetry, there exists some Chinese cultural image, which relates to cultural background and living customs. For example, "green" stands for vitality and hope, "red leaves" stands for the love between man and woman, "plum" "orchid" "bamboo" "chrysanthemum" stands for noble quality- "plum" stands for noble and unsullied, "orchid" stands for elegant and graceful, "bamboo" stands for positive integrity, "chrysanthemum" stands for hermit and unworldly, which are popular among Chinese literary intellectuals.

Cultural image is the language sign of cultural record, it embodies great wisdom and experience of human beings. It is the spiritual fruit which different nations observe and analyze outside world, is nations' historical precipitation and cultural crystallization. It highly embodies every nation's cultural spirit, reflects nation's collective unconsciousness. These cultural images change depend on their cultural source, and they become precious legacy of national culture. It is difficult to achieve complete cultural equivalence when transfer these cultural image from one language to another language. But the translation and transmission of cultural image has been an important form of cultural communication and spread. Especially in the cultural context of globalization, Eastern and Western culture become a cultural

pattern of mutual penetration, fusion and complementation.

II. THE CLASSIFICATION OF IMAGE

A. Numeral image

Number seems simple and boring, while it has rich meaning because of its unique cultural connotation. Chinese classical poems are very charming, which contains a lot of numeral images. Compared with Western countries, numbers in China have many different meanings. In Chinese poems, number contains rich culture and specific rhetorical means. Therefore, numeral translation should not be ignored because its different meanings in different cultural background. For example:

“梧桐树，三更雨，不道离情更苦。
一叶叶，一声声，空阶滴到明。”（温庭筠《更漏子》）

Translation

“The lonely withered tress. And midnight rain and breeze. Don't care about her bitter parting sorrow. Leaf on leaf without grief. Drop by drop without stop. They fall on vacant steps until the morrow.”

Figure.1. Song of water clock at night translated by Xu Yuanchong.

As shown in Figure.1., Xu didn't translate the number directly, while he use “Leaf on leaf without grief, drop by drop without stop” to imitate the sentence pattern of source text, which expresses complete meaning and produces tuneful swing. Xu's version retains the source text's rhythm beauty and formal beauty, it has highly readability and express deep parting sorrow of the source text.

“白日依山尽，黄河入海流。
欲穷千里目，更上一层楼。”（王之涣《登鹤雀楼》）

Translation

“The sun beyond the mountains glows. The Yellow River seawards flows,
You can enjoy a grander sight. By climbing to a greater height.”

Figure.2. On the stock tower translated by Xu Yuanchong.

As shown in Figure.2., Xu translates “qian li” and “yi ceng lou” to “sight” and “height”, it seems different with literal meaning from the source text, but it is easy to find it corresponds to the main idea of the poem. “greater” and “grander” are added to modify “sight” and “height”, which express the magnificent scene vividly. In a word, though Xu's version downplays the literal meaning of the source text, the poet's idea and feeling is fully represented.

B. Color image

Tang-Song poetry is competitive product of Chinese traditional cultural treasury, is the summit of Chinese classical poems. Poets show us many beautiful picture by using several colors. In Tang-Song poetry, every color is filled with feelings regardless of describing scene and expressing thoughts. Various colors show poets' rich inner world

and broad social life in Tang-Song poems. For example:

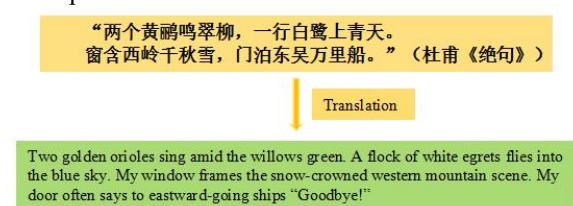


Figure.3. A quatrain translated by Xu Yuanchong.

As shown in Figure.3., the poem creates a bright and pleasant atmosphere based on natural beautiful scenery. In the first two sentences, “golden” “green” “white” “blue” constructs a beautiful landscape painting. These warm colors express the poet's positive attitude and vivid scene of early spring, which make readers get the main idea of the source text.

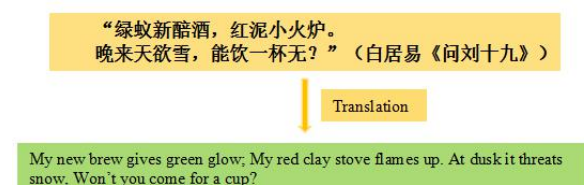


Figure.4. Requesting Mr. Liu, the nineteenth translated by Xu Yuanchong.

As shown in Figure.4., Liu shijiu is the poet's friend, this poem has no profound hopes and flowery ornate terms, but the happy and warm tone is filled with every word, which express the poet's enthusiasm. “green glow” describes the wine's fresh and rough, which make readers feel the wine's good smell. “red clay stove” is tendentious and heighten atmosphere, the wine is attractive, while red clay stove adds warm atmosphere.

C. Sound image

Image refers to those objects which involve poet's emotion. People are used to regard image as those objective materials, however, image includes some sound images, which appear in classical poems usually. For example:

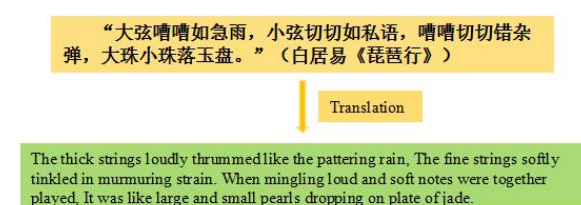


Figure.5. Song of a pipa player translated by Xu Yuanchong.

As shown in Figure.5., “cao cao” and “qie qie” are mimetic words, Xu didn't copy them simply by using onomatopoeia, but he added vivid adverbs - loudly and softly, and verbs - thrum and tinkle, which express the features of sound exactly. “loud and soft” and “large and small” construct striking contrast, which make the target text more lively and vivid.



Figure.6. Slow, slow tune translated by Xu Yuanchong.

As shown in Figure.6., autumn rain falls on the phoenix tree leaves, which attracts the sorrows of poet, “dian dian di di” indicates the rain patter and the rainy weather. Xu use “grizzles” to express the gloomy tone, shows the phonology beauty of the source text through rhyme.

D. Animal Image

Animal culture is an unique carrier in Chinese classical poems. As an indispensable part of Chinese culture, animal images have profound and rich cultural meaning. But because of the difference of cultures, the same animal image stands for different meanings, which improves the difficulty of animal image translation. For example:

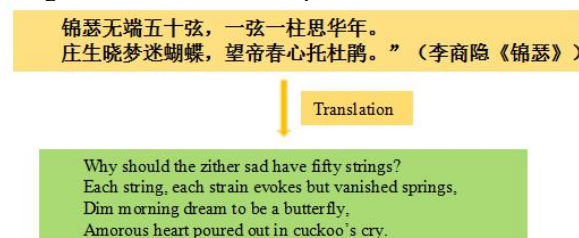


Figure.7. The sad zither translated by Xu Yuanchong.

As shown in Figure.7., the third sentence is come from a literary quotation---Chuang Chou Dreaming a Butterfly, Xu didn't focus on Chuang Chou, and not translate the butterfly directly, he translated to “dim dream”, which make readers understand the original meaning of this sentence. “Dim” expresses the grief and confusion of poet. Since Tang dynasty, the cuckoo is regarded as sad bird or hatred bird. Xu added “cry” after “cuckoo” to show the poet's indignantly resent to the end of the story, and the source text's sad tone.

III. IMAGE TRANSLATION STRATEGIES

Translator should notice that images should follow the original meaning of the source text when translate them, and guarantee the objectivity of translation, not add translators' subjective ideas. But sometimes, because of difference of language, culture, and custom, it is difficult to follow the meaning of source text for translation. There are some image translation strategies:

A. Preservation

If some images in poems are proper, and they have highly aesthetic value and artistic value, then they should be preserved in the process of translation. For example:

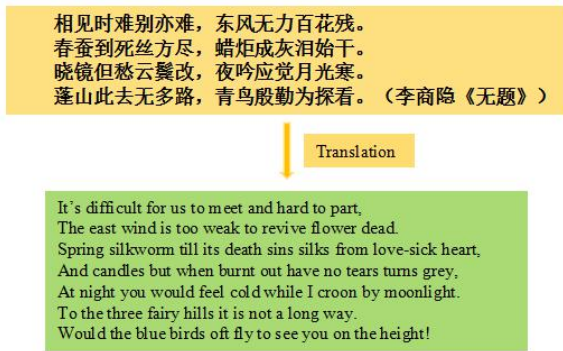


Figure.8. To one unnamed translated by Xu Yuanchong.

As shown in Figure.8., the poem describes the love between man and woman, there are a lot of Chinese cultural images. In Xu's version, "the east wind", "dead flower". "candles", "moonlight", "the three fairy hills" and other cultural images are preserved directly, and are modified by "weak", "burnt out", "grey", "cold" and other words, which expresses the sentiment of missing of protagonist. From the perspective of art, these images are classical, and have profound meaning and highly artistic value.

B. Transplantation

Transplantation is a translation means of copying the culture of source language, that is to say, the thoughts and ideas of source language keep consistent in the ideas of target language, or try to reserve the image, metaphor and rhetorical devices of source language and highlight the feature of target language. This means is helpful to understand and accept other cultures, and add new ideas to culture of the target language. For example:

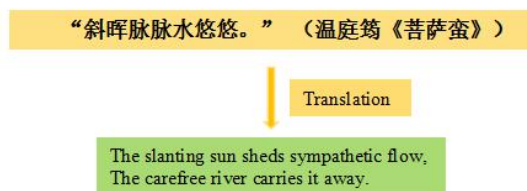


Figure.9. Buddhist dancers translated by Xu Yuanchong.

As shown in Figure.9., “mo mo” and “you you” are translated to “sympathetic” and “carefree”, which is understandable and exactly. The emotion of the source text is expressed in plain words.



Figure.10. Ripple sifting sand translated by Xu Yuanchong.

As shown in Figure.10., Xu translated “tian shang” to “paradise”, which accords with Western culture, and express the meaning of original sentence.

In Chinese culture, “tian shang” has no pain, no sorrow, which has same meaning with “paradise”.

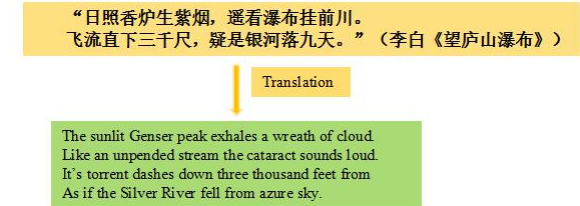


Figure.11. Cataract on mount lu translated by Xu Yuanchong.

As shown in Figure.11., the original poem relates to the cultural image “Yin he”, according to the knowledge of astronomy, its English is “the Milky Way”, but the connotation of “Yin he” in China is different from “the Milky Way” in West, so the associative meanings are different, which causes the loss of culture. Xu translated “Yin he” to “Silver River”, which make the artistic cultural image is preserved completely, and transfer the artistic effect of the source text.

C. Omission

Because of Chinese long history and rich culture, in Chinese classical poems, some images cannot correspond to English. These images is national appearance, they reflect the nation's historical culture and customs. Given the feature of these images, omission can be used in translation, that is avoiding the image of source text, but translate its meaning directly. For example:



Figure.12. Seeing meng haoran off at yellow crane tower translated by Xu Yuanchong.

As shown in Figure.12., “Yang Zhou” and “Chang Jiang” are omitted, Xu translated them to “River Town” and “endless River”, which show the feature of “Yang Zhou” and “Chang Jiang” exactly. Readers can understand the meaning of the poem.

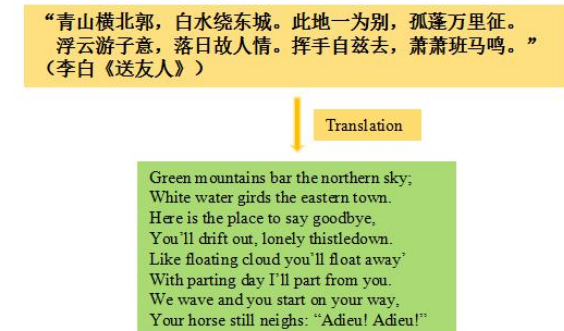


Figure.13. Farewell to a friend translated by Xu Yuanchong.

As shown in Figure.13., the poet express the

feeling of separation from his best friend through some images, such as “green mountains”, “white water” “eastern town”. “wan li” in English means “thousands of miles”, in Chinese, it refers to the far distance. Xu omitted the “thousands of miles”, while translate to “lonely thistledown”. In the third sentence, Xu omitted the image of “You zi”, and “luo ri”, and he used “you” and “parting day” to express the poet's meaning.

IV. CONCLUSION

Images constructs the beauty of poems, whose unique cultural characteristics not only show the colorful perspective of understanding culture for translators, but also provide endless imaginary space for translation. Chinese classical poems' image translation is a hot topic among translators. When translate images of poems, translator not only transfer the cultural images of the source text, but also think about the acceptability of target readers, that is, guarantee the readability of the target text.

REFERENCES

- [1] Y. C. Xu, “An Anthology of Classical Chinese Poetry,” Beijing, New World Press, 1994.
- [2] Y. C. Xu, “Vanished Springs: The Life and Love of Chinese Intellectual,” New York, Vantage Press, 1999.
- [3] E. A. Nida, “Language, Culture, and Translating,” Shanghai, Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press, 1993.
- [4] A. Lefevere, “Translation, Rewriting and the Manipulation of Literature Fame,” Shanghai, Shanghai Foreign Language Education press, 2004.
- [5] Y. C. Xu, “The Book of Poetry,” Changsha, Hunan Publishing House, 1993.
- [6] E. Pound, “Cathay in Ezra Pound: Selected Poems,” London, Faber Limited, 1934.
- [7] P. Newmark, “A Textbook of Translation,” Oxford, Pergamon. 1988.
- [8] P. Newmark, “Paragraphs on Translation,” Philadelphia, Multilingual Matters, 1989.
- [9] A. Lefevere, “Translation-History, Culture: a Source Book,” London, Routledge, 1992.
- [10] Z. D. Liu, “Ten Lectures on Literary Translation,” Beijing, China Translation& Publishing Coreporation, 1991.