



A Comparison of English Translations of Su Shi's Song Ci Poetry under the "Truth-Seeking-Beauty-Attaining" Translator Behavior Continuum—Xu's and Watson's translations as examples

Deng Shuang, Wang Feng*

School of Foreign Studies, Yangtze University, Jingzhou, China

* Corresponding Author Email: wangfeng@yangtzeu.edu.cn

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Abstract— Based on the theory of translator behavior criticism, this paper takes the English translation of Su Shi's Song ci poetry as the object of study and compares Xu Yuanchong's translation with that of Burton Watson. With the help of seven poetry translation strategies (phonemic translation, literal translation, metrical translation, poetry into prose, rhymed translation, blank verse translation and interpretation) as summarized by André Lefevere, a "truth-seeking-beauty-attaining" continuum evaluation model is established to compare and analyze the translators' tendency to choose translation strategies in order to reproduce the scenes and emotions in Song ci poetry. By applying the theory of translator behavior criticism to the choice of translator, we point out that the translation of Song ci poetry should not only express the meaning of the original text but, more importantly, reflect the cultural meaning and beauty of the poems.

Keywords— Song ci poetry, Seven strategies, Translator Behavior Criticism, Truth-Seeking-Beauty-Attaining.

I. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, China has been making efforts to promote the overseas dissemination of Chinese literature. Ci poetry is a unique form of poetry, an emerging metrical poetic style resulting from the combination of poetry and music. As the artistic peak of Chinese classical poetry, Song ci poems are the treasures of ancient Chinese literature. The meter and realm of Song ci poetry are the wonders of Chinese literary history, making them unforgettable. As a poetic genre suitable for singing with independent artistic values, ci poetry has a fixed format in terms of the number of words, stanzas, rhymes, rhythms, and the level and obliquity of the words used (Yan Zhangrong, 2005). Burton Watson, one of the most famous contemporary

American sinologists and translators, has greatly promoted the spread of Chinese culture overseas with research and translation of classical Chinese literature. Unlike Tang poetry, with a late start and a small number of successful translators, Song ci poetry abroad is not optimistic in its translation and publication (Dai Yuxia, Cheng Ying, 2016). But the *Selected Poems of Su Dongpo* translated by Watson has become one of the few successful cases of English translation and publication of classical Chinese poetry. His translation style is simple, but loved by the majority of readers in English-speaking countries. Xu Yuanchong is a famous translator in China and is internationally renowned for his English translations of Chinese poetry. His translation of *Three Hundred Song Ci Poetry* pursues both neat rhyming and full realm,

spreading the beauty of classical Chinese culture. The spread of Song ci poetry at home and abroad cannot be separated from the careful polishing by the translators. Thus, this paper takes the English translations of Su Shi's Song ci poetry as an example, and compares and analyzes the techniques used by two typical English translators to reproduce the form and mood of the original text, with a view to contributing to subsequent studies of Song ci poetry translation.

II. TRANSLATOR BEHAVIOR CRITICISM AND THE "TRUTH-SEEKING-BEAUTY-ATTAINING" CONTINUUM MODEL OF EVALUATION

Translator behavior criticism focuses on the role of the translator as a body of wills in the process of translation socialization and the general behavior characteristics (Zhou Lingshun, 2014:1). Based on full description, this approach coordinates the inside and outside of translation, and regards the translator as the dual carrier of linguistic identity and social role. It is facing not only the original text, but also the society, thus extending the "Truth-Seeking-Utility-Attaining" Model of Continuum of Evaluation of the translator's behavior. The "truth-seeking" and "utility-attaining" are in a state of gradual change, respectively at the two ends of the continuum. The choice of "truth-seeking" and "utility-attaining" by translators is both self-constrained and constrained by the socio-cultural environment.

André Lefevere believes that in literary translation, it is not enough for the translator to translate the linguistic meaning, which is only the minimum requirement for translation. In fact, a literary translator has to translate the communicative meaning of the original as faithfully as possible. He summarized seven strategies of poetry translation and their gains and losses as a guide for poetry translation and literary translation in general: (1) phonemic translation: fidelity to the resource text means, purely and simple, fidelity to the sound, to the near exclusion of all other elements; (2) literal translation: fidelity to the sense of the source text; (3) metrical translation: fidelity to the metre of the source text, thus more or less preserving its outward form; (4) poetry into prose: fairly elegant in language, avoiding most of the distortions and verbal antics; (5) rhymed translation: restriction of metre and demand on the look-out for the right rhyme-words; (6) blank verse translation: free from the obligation of metrical scheme and the regularity of metrical system; (7) interpretation: different degree of interpretation results in translation, version (change in form) and interpretation (produce a new poem) (Lefevere, 1975). At the same time,

Lefevere opposes the mechanical use of these strategies in isolation from the textual and cultural dimensions. His categorization reflects different degrees of alienation and naturalization, truth-seeking and beauty-seeking. Strategies (1) to (7) are arranged in an orderly and detailed manner. The contradiction in literary translation is mainly the contradiction between "faith" (or "truth") and "beauty" (Xu Yuanchong, 2012:84). On this basis, this paper establishes a continuum model of "Truth-Seeking-Beauty-Attaining", which can objectively describe and analyze the translator's behavior.

III. TEXT ANALYSIS

Example1. 簌簌衣巾落枣花，村南村北响缫车。牛衣古柳卖黄瓜。酒困路长惟欲睡，日高人渴漫思茶。敲门试问野人家。

This ci poem is mainly about what the ci poet saw, heard and felt on his way to Shitan, describing the rural scenery with vivid strokes, reflecting the emotions of the peasants, rejoicing in their joy and sympathizing with their sufferings. It starts from typical things in the countryside and expresses the simple rural flavor with great interest. There are several translations of this ci poem, and this paper selects the translations by Watson and Xu Yuanchong for analysis.

*Flutter, flutter, on clothes and cap, jujube flowers fall;
village south, village north echo to spinning reels.
Half leaning on the old willow, they peddle yellow melons.
Wine-drowsy, a long road, I'm getting sleepier;
sun high, throat parched, thinking only of tea
I'll knock on a gate and see what the villagers'll give me.*

(Burton Watson, 1994:71)

*Date-flowers fall in showers on my hooded head,
At both ends of the village wheels are spinning thread,
A straw-cloak'd man sells cucumber beneath a willow tree.
Wine-drowsy when the road is long, i yawn for bed;
Throat parched when sun is high, i long for tea,
I'll knock at this door. What have they for me?*

(Xu Yuanchong, 2011:265)

Chinese poetic forms of the time influenced the American poetic style and contributed to the American free verse movement, and most classical Chinese poems were translated into free verse in the English-speaking world (Zhao Yiheng, 2013:200). Under this trend, Watson has always advocated abandoning the traditional English poetic metre and traditional poetic phrases. Instead, he translated ancient poems with modern English norms, aiming for readers to understand and appreciate their connotations. For example, in the first line, Watson translated the onomatopoeic superlative "簌簌" as "Flutter, flutter". He combined Lefevere's literal translation method with the metrical translation method to make the translation not only mean the same thing as faithful the original, but also achieve the same form. Watson's translation respects the original works, reproducing the scene of date flowers falling on pedestrians with a vivid and wonderful artistic conception that strikes a balance between seeking truth and beauty. The theory of "Three Beauties" proposed by Mr. Xu Yuanchong is an important theory in the field of poetry translation. He believes that the translation of poetry should achieve the beauty of meaning, sound and form, of which the beauty of meaning is the most important, the beauty of sound is the second and the beauty of form is the last (Xu Yuanchong, 1987: 70). In the first line, Xu Yuanchong translates "簌簌" as "in shower". He pursues more the communication of the meaning than the formal consistency with the original, so as to convey the beauty of the ci poetry. He uses "in shower" to paint a beautiful picture of falling date blossoms scattering in the sky, leaving behind the reduplicative word.

Meanwhile, Xu Yuanchong most often used the rhymed translation method in his English translations of ancient poems. Rhyme is one of the features that create the beauty of Song ci poetry and is a factor that cannot be ignored in translation. It is easy to find that the ci poet uses "花", "瓜", "茶" and "家" to rhyme at the end of every sentence. In the translation, Xu Yuanchong used "head", "thread", "bed", "tree" and "me" to rhyme respectively. He adjusted the order of lines on the basis of faithfulness to the original text, so that the translation could present the rhyme scheme of AABABB and preserve the phonetic beauty of Song ci poetry. Although translating the original text into free-form poetry can better adapt to the reading habits of English-speaking readers, it cannot more accurately convey the musical beauty carried by Song ci poetry. By reproducing the rhythm and rhyme of the ci poem, Xu Yuanchong maximized the uniqueness of the Song ci poem and moves closer to the "beauty" end of the continuum. As an American translator, Watson undoubtedly chose the unrhymed free verse style in his

translation of poems. With the unrhymed translation method, the translator can express his ideas more accurately and convey the literary nature of the original. Watson was not satisfied that the translation fit the original text in terms of meaning, but he was also very careful in wording and phrasing. He used a lot of simple and common monosyllabic verbs, such as "fall," "lean," "get," "think" and so on, to paint a fresh picture of the countryside and to show the original ci poet's relaxed and cheerful mood after the drought and the rain. He used a lot of "verb +ing" patterns to make people static and objects dynamic to enhance the vivid effect, so that readers can feel what the ci poet saw and felt along the way as if they were there, which objectively helps readers further understand the beauty of the original text. In addition, Watson made good use of punctuation and breaks to express the original text in a simple and smooth way, forming a natural rhythm and fully expressing the freshness and simplicity conveyed in this ci poem.

Example2. 十年生死两茫茫，不思量，自难忘。千里孤坟，无处话凄凉。纵使相逢应不识，尘满面，鬓如霜。夜来幽梦忽还乡，小轩窗，正梳妆。相顾无言，惟有泪千行。料得年年肠断处，明月夜，短松冈。

This is a ci poem written by Su Shi to his late wife, expressing his unending sorrow and longing. The first stanza is realistic, expressing the ci poet's deep longing for his deceased wife, while the second stanza describes the dream, writing about his deep feelings for his deceased wife. Zhou Ruchang, in his *Dictionary of Appreciation of Tang and Song Ci Poetry*, says: "This ci poem uses a straightforward style of writing throughout, with genuine emotion and sincerity, without any traces of carving; the language is simple, but the implication is very profound (Zhou Ruchang, 2011: 693-694).

Ten years – dead and living dim and draw apart.

I don't try to remember

but forgetting is hard.

Lonely grave a thousand miles off,

cold thoughts – where can I talk them out?

Even if we met you wouldn't know me,

dust on my face,

hair like frost –

In a dream last night suddenly was home.

By the window of the little room

you were combing your hair and making up.

You turned and looked, not speaking,

*only lines of tears coursing down –
year after year will it break my heart?
The moonlit grave,
its stubby pines.*

(Burton Watson, 1994:71)

*For ten long years the living of the dead knows
nought.
Though to my mind not brought,
Could the dead be forgot?
Her lonely grave is far, a thousand miles away.
To whom can I my grief convey?
Revived, e'en if she be, oh, could she still know me?
My face is worn with care
And frosted is my hair.
Last night I dreamed of coming to our native place;
She's making up her face
Before her mirror with grace.
Each the other hushed,
But from our eyes tears gushed.
When I am woken, oh, I know I'll be heart-broken
Each night when the moon shines
O'er her grave clad with pines.*

(Xu Yuanchong, 2011:247)

Watson adopts the literal translation method, translating word by word and line by line, which is almost consistent with the meaning, emotion, sentence pattern and grammatical structure of the original text, and realizes the equal transmission of information in the translation with simple words and sentence patterns. He is not too particular about the rhyme in the original text, but translates it in the form of English prose poetry. At the same time, in order to convey the image, he uses "draw apart" and "dim" to vividly express the scene of the separation between the ci poet and his wife. In the second line, he does not directly translate the number "千", but pursues the meaning behind it. Watson translates it as "lines of tears coursing down", which retains the beauty of the original text on the basis of making readers better understand the original text. The translation reflects a high level of pursuit of aesthetic experience. What Xu Yuanchong pursues is to rhyme the translation while conveying the image. Adopting the combination of interpretation and rhymed translation method, he translates "尘满面" into "face is won with care", and introduces

"with grace" into the English translation of "小轩窗，正梳妆" in order to achieve the purpose of rhyme. However, Xu Yuanchong changes the word order and uses "nought", "brought" and "forgot" to rhyme, which made the translation slightly tongue-twisty and unsmooth. In the last line "明月夜，短松岗", in order to rhyme, he omits the character "短" to retain the characteristics of Song ci poetry. The above choices of the translator do not "harm the meaning with rhyme" but maintain the beauty of the poem. On the contrary, Watson's translation mostly uses short sentences, which are not limited to form. The images are accurate and vivid, which makes the translation easier to read.

IV. CONCLUSION

The English translation of Song ci poetry has to pursue both the beauty of artistic conception of the original text and the musical beauty such as rhythm and rhyme, which undoubtedly places extremely high demands on the translators. The two translators, Watson and Xu Yuanchong, have flexibly adopted the translation strategies proposed by Lefevere in their English translations, reflecting their profound linguistic and cultural skills. Among the seven strategies, the phonemic and metrical translation methods are the two least used strategies. Due to the uniqueness of Chinese characters, translator cannot render the sound of the source text in the target language. In fact, phonemic translation only very rarely achieves an acceptable rendering of the source-language sound and an acceptable paraphrase of its sense. As for the metrical translation, if one is committed to a certain number of feet in a line, one is limited in the choice of words or even forced to mutilate words. What's more, the unstressed and stressed syllables in English translations are almost impossible to be equivalent to the metrics of Song ci poetry, and it is also difficult to fully preserve the original form on the basis of conveying the original sense of the works. In his English translation of Song ci poetry, Xu Yuanchong preferred to use rhymed translation method, which can express the musical characteristics of traditional Chinese poetry. Although in a few cases the result is unacceptable in the target language, rhyme can "make the sound beautiful to the ear" and meet the translator's purpose of spreading Chinese culture. Watson tends to translate poetry into prose and writes blank verse. Under the background of the American Free Verse Movement, poetry strives for liberation in style and language, not bound by rhyme and rhythm, forming a free way of expression. This way can withhold information helpful for understanding the source text while reducing the delicate beauty of Song ci poetry. But his choice of

translation strategies is more in line with the aesthetics of western scholars and readers. The interpretation method used by both translators serves as a way to produce additional communicative value. At the same time, it even leaves enough space for the two translators to portray the beauty of the context of the original text.

Watson's translation is easy to understand, catering to the receptive psychology of the target language readers and approaching the aesthetics of the public. Professor Xu Yuanchong conveys the beauty of traditional Chinese literature without changing the original meaning of the poems, and seeks to reflect the beauty of the poems in terms of imagery and form. In contrast to Watson's translation, Xu Yuanchong's translation reflects the translator's tendency to act socially in order to promote the beauty of Chinese culture. Watson's translation is loved by most readers abroad and is highly accepted. Xu Yuanchong's translation, though not as well received, upholds the uniqueness of classical Chinese culture. Both translators adopted different strategies, principles and methods to convey the meaning of the original text based on their own understanding of Su Shi's Song ci poetry and shaped their excellent translations. A translator who translates a beautiful poem in an unattractive way cannot be considered to have preserved the truth (Xu Yuanchong, 2021:26). Therefore, in translating ancient Chinese poems, a good translator should not only convey the meaning of the original text, but also reflect the culture and beauty of the original text.

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