



**A STUDY ON THE TANG POETRY TRANSLATION
IN THE PERSPECTIVE OF “HARMONY-GUIDED THREE-LEVEL
POETRY TRANSLATION CRITERIA” - A CASE STUDY OF LI BAI’S
“CLIMBING THE PHOENIX TERRACE IN JINLING”**

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Abstract:

Tang poetry is the precious cultural heritages of the Chinese. Li Bai is one of the most outstanding poets in the Tang Dynasty and his poems have had a far-reaching impact on following generations. This paper attempts to use the “*Harmony-Guided Three-Level Poetry Translation Criteria*” put forward by Dr. Wang Feng, from the macro, middle and micro levels to analyze and compare four English versions of Li Bai’s “*Climbing the Phoenix Terrace in Jinling*”. Then, the authors retranslate the original poem and encourage researchers to pay more attention to the field of Tang poetry translation and promote the dissemination of Chinese classical poetry.

Keywords: Li Bai; harmony-guided three-level poetry translation criteria; Tang poetry translation

1. Introduction

During the Tang Dynasty, the development of Chinese classical poetry is at the height. Li Bai’s poetry is not only the symbol of the prosperity of Tang poetry, but also the pinnacle of Chinese classical poetry. Li Bai’s poems sparkle with the light of human nature everywhere, which clearly shows his urgent pursuit of personal independence and personal dignity. Li Bai is deeply concerned about the current situation of the country, the future of the nation and the livelihood of the people, and holds a strong sense of social responsibility. Li Bai’s poetry has an important position and far-reaching influence in the history of the development of poetry in China and even in the world. Joseph Edkins is the first western scholar to publish a research paper on Li Bai’s poetry and makes an

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important breakthrough, although some of his research results are not accurate (Zhou, 2012). After that, Pound and Waley introduced Li Bai's poems to the West with free-style poems. H.A. Giles and W.J.B. Fletcher insist that Li Bai's poems should be translated into rhymed poems. In the second half of the 20th century, many Chinese scholars participated in the English translation of Li Bai's poems, among which Xu Zhongjie and Sun Dayu were the representatives. As for the translations and researches of "*Climbing the Phoenix Terrace in Jinling*", American scholar Ernest Fenollosa and American poet Ezra Pound once translated it. Fenollosa's translated version is based on the explanation of Japanese sinologist Mori Kainan, while Pound's translation is based on Fenollosa's notes and translation; Pound is better than Fenollosa in terms of understanding the original poem (Wu, 2012). Zhang and Yu (2015) applied the Foregrounding Theory to interpret Pound's translation, realizing the organic combination of meaning, form and embodiment and achieving the unity of theme, vocabulary, syntax and prosody in the analysis and interpretation of poetry. Moreover, a Chinese scholar made a comprehensive appreciation and comparison of Sun Dayu's translation and Pound's translation and concludes that only through an in-depth analysis of the aesthetic components of the original poem can the translator fully reproduce the charm of the original poem and make the reader get the same aesthetic feeling (He, 2016).

2. Harmony-Guided Three-Level Poetry Translation Criteria

2.1 Macro Level: Harmony

"Harmony" inherits the concept of "neutralism" in ancient Chinese philosophy. In the poetry translation activities full of contradictions and opposites, "Harmony" puts more emphasis on the beauty of internal harmony covering various aesthetic forms and turning disagreements into harmony and balance (Wang, 2015).

2.2 Middle Level: Similarity in Style, Sense, and Poetic Conception

Similarity in Style: when translating a poem, it means that the style of the translated poem is similar to that of the original poem. The translator chooses the original work which is similar to his own translation style, and it is easier for the translator to reproduce the style of the original poem. The translation style should be restricted by the original style, and the translator should not deviate from the original style when giving full play to the translator's subjectivity. Similarity in Sense: the translation of poems needs to take into account the cultural differences between Chinese culture with high contexts and English culture with low contexts so as to ensure that the meaning of the translated poems coincides with that of the original poems. Similarity in poetic conception: the comprehensive effect produced by the translated poem in the mind of the target reader is similar to that of the original poem in the mind of the source language reader.

2.3 Micro level: Eight Beauties Criteria

The Eight Beauties Criteria at the micro level contains eight kinds of beauty: beauty in form, beauty in musicality, beauty in image, beauty in emotion, beauty in connotation, beauty in diction, beauty in allusion, and beauty in gestalt.

First, beauty in form refers to the unity of the external forms of poetry, including the number of lines, arrangement, length, indentation, structure and so on. From the viewer's point of view, the beauty in form of poetry is the first element to arouse aesthetic response, with a pleasant visual effect; Second, beauty in musicality refers to the aesthetic sound expressed through rhythm and meter in poetry. Beauty of music is an indispensable part of most Tang poems and should be reproduced as far as possible in English translation; Third, the beauty in image refers to the organic combination of subjective emotion and external images; Fourth, the beauty in emotion refers to what poets express through scenery and objects; Fifth, the beauty of suggestiveness is one of the unique aesthetic characteristics of Chinese poetry, full of implication and great charm; Sixth, the beauty in diction refers to the best application of words and phrases; Seventh, the beauty of allusions refers to the aesthetic feeling of allusions produced in the reader's mind; Eighth, the beauty of gestalt refers to the beauties in all aspects except the seven beauties as mentioned above, pursuing the comprehensive sense that the whole is greater than the sum of the parts (Wang and Ma, 2011).

3. An Analysis of Li Bai's "Climbing the Phoenix Terrace in Jinling"

3.1 Li Bai and "Climbing the Phoenix Terrace in Jinling"

With regard to the writing background of "Climbing the Phoenix Terrace in Jinling", someone believes that Li Bai wrote it for competing with the poet Cui Hao (Zhang, 2000). Cui Hao's "Yellow Crane Tower" was highly praised by the ancients. In the spring of the 16th year of Tang, Li Bai was supposed to write a poem on the wall of the Yellow Crane Tower, but he stopped writing it because he saw the poem written by Cui Hao, saying, "I fail to write about the sight in my poem, because Cui Hao's poem is on the wall." (眼前有景道不得，崔颢题诗在上头。) It was not until Li Bai traveled through Jinling and wanted to compete with Cui Hao that he wrote "Climbing the Phoenix Terrace in Jinling". Another view is that the Tang Dynasty began to decline because of the An-Shi Rebellion. The expression of "floating clouds cover the sky" (浮云蔽日) in the last two lines were also implying that Emperor Xuanzong of Tang spoiled Yang Yuhuai and abandoned the imperial government, which led to the An-Shi Rebellion, and thus Chang'an was in the control of Hu people. Exiled for being slandered by villains, Li Bai wrote this poem purely out of nostalgia and his worries about Emperor Xuanzong. When he boarded the Phoenix Terrace, he could not see Chang'an. Therefore, he wrote this poem for the moment when he saw such a magnificent scene. The Chinese poem reads:

凤凰台上凤凰游，凤去台空江自流。
吴宫花草埋幽径，晋代衣冠成古丘。
三山半落青天外，一水中分白鹭洲。
总为浮云能蔽日，长安不见使人愁。

"*Climbing the Phoenix Terrace in Jinling*" is one of Li Bai's seven-character rhyme poems. With eight lines and 56 words, it not only expresses the feeling of nostalgia for the past time, but also describes the spectacular natural scenery. Finally, it concludes with a chanting of political resentment. Historical, natural and social elements are all in the poem. The legend of the Phoenix Terrace was mentioned in the first two lines, three "Phoenix" characters are used in succession in the fourteen words, but it does not feel like being verbose. In feudal times, the phoenix was a kind of auspiciousness. At that time, the visit of the phoenix symbolized the prosperity of the dynasty. But when the phoenix was gone, the prosperous scene was also gone forever. Only the water of the Yangtze River is still flowing continuously, and Nature is the eternal existence. The poet said with emotion that the former prosperous court of the State of Wu had been deserted, and great figures and outstanding talents in the Eastern Jin Dynasty had passed away and been laid in the graves. That moment of glory has not left anything of value in history. The fifth and sixth lines show that the poet is not completely immersed in the lament for the changing history. The grandeur of Nature not only gives people a broad mind, but also pulls people back to reality from the reverie of history, and re-feels the beauty and eternity of Nature. The last two lines of the poem imply that the emperor is surrounded by villains and that the poet has no way to serve his country; therefore, he felt great sadness.

3.2 An Analysis of the Translated Versions under Harmony-Guided Three-Level Poetry Translation Criteria

In the following content, the authors will use the Harmony-guided Three-Level poetry translation criteria as the theoretical guidance to compare and analyze four translations with different styles in China and the West. The four translations are from Sun Dayu (2007), Xu Yuanchong (2007), Ezra Pound (1915) and Robert Payne (1947).

3.2.1 Macro Level

At the macro level, when translators use poetry translation methods and strategies, they should take "harmony" as the standard to guide poetry translation. The literal translation method and free verse are adopted in the translation of Pound, and the translation is still faithful to the original. Literal translation is also generally adopted in Payne's translation. But the word "lord" obviously has characteristics of Western culture. The translations of the two Western translators are concise and easy to understand. Sun's translation is literal and has a certain number of footnotes, which help English readers understand the context of poetry and the feelings the poet Li Bai wants to express. The translation of Xu adopts

the method of free translation and adds his own imagination and interpretation. In all, the two Chinese translators use more advanced words in their translations.

There are a large number of images in the original poem, which suggest the implication of Chinese classical culture. These cultural implications are familiar to Chinese readers, but not to foreign readers, so it is difficult to translate them. Although the four translators have different translation methods, they all try to get close to both the form and the spirit of the poem.

3.2.2 Middle Level

From the perspective of the similarity in style, among the four translators, two foreign translators are more faithful to the original than the two Chinese translators. The translation of Pound is closest to the original style. The language is simple, concise and easy to understand. From the perspective of similarity in sense and poetic conception, only the translation of Sun is added with seven footnotes, explaining in detail some important Chinese cultural images such as the Phoenix Terrace (凤凰台), Wu Palaces (吴宫), West Jin (西晋), The Tri-Peaked Mount (三山), Egret Ait (白鹭洲) and so on. What's more, these footnotes are helpful for low-context English readers to understand high-context Chinese poetry. If these images are not explained in detail, English readers may not know what the poem expresses, and the charm of poetry will be greatly reduced. "Ruined palace" and "ancient sages in caps and gowns" are used to translate Wu Palaces (吴宫) and great figures of West Jin (晋代衣冠) in Xu's translation, which will probably make the comprehensive effect of the translated poem in the minds of English readers different from that of the original poem in the minds of Chinese readers.

3.2.3 Micro Level

The "Eight Beauties Criteria" at the micro level includes eight kinds of beauty: beauty in form, beauty in musicality, beauty in image, beauty in emotion, beauty in connotation, beauty in diction, beauty in allusion, and beauty in gestalt.

3.2.3.1 Beauty in Form

The original text of "Climbing the Phoenix Terrace in Jinling" consists of eight seven-character lines totaling 56 words with a high sense of beauty in form. The translation of Pound consists of 13 lines with a variable number of syllables in each line. Payne's translation consists of 10 lines and the number of syllables also varies with lines. The translation of Sun consists of 11 lines, most of which have 14 syllables, and a few lines have 12 or 13 syllables. Xu's translation has eight lines, which is consistent with the original. There are 12 or 13 syllables in each line. Xu's translation best meets the standard of beauty in form. Chinese belongs to the Sino-Tibetan language family and English belongs to the Indo-European languages family; therefore, it is difficult to show the beauty in form fully. It can be placed in a less important position in poetry translation, taking into account the reproduction of other beauties (Wang, 2015).

3.2.3.2 Beauty in Musicality

From the angle of the musical beauty of poetry, there are four tones of "Ping", "Shang", "Qu" and "Ru" in ancient Chinese. "Ping" is also called "level tone"; "Shang, Qu and Ru" are also called "oblique tone". The use of "level tones" and "oblique tones" in the original pome is a bit different from the standard seven-character rhymed poems. Although the rhyme of the first two lines and the last two lines are in accordance with the standard, the rhyme of the third to the sixth lines differs from the standard rhythm. Despite the fact that it is an ancient-style rhymed poem, it has an end rhyme scheme in even-numbered lines. "流" (liu), "丘" (qiu), "洲" (zhou) and "愁" (chou) all rhyme. "Climbing the Phoenix Terrace in Jinling" is one of Li Bai's representative seven-character rhymed poems. Though there are occasional irregularities in it, it still can be regarded as an outstanding seven-character rhymed poem. Different from Chinese, the tone and rhythm of English syllables are mainly reflected in the rhythms with rich forms. The rhyme scheme of both Sun and Xu is ABAB // CDCD // EFEF // GG. It is not necessary to force a rhyme into the translated versions in order to seek the beauty in music, supposing that a few poems are not up to the standard of rhyme in classical Tang poetry (Wang, 2015). The translations of the two foreign translators are in free style without rhyme.

3.2.3.3 Beauty in Image

A scholar has proposed that "the interpretation of poetry begins with the image." (Zhang, 2018: 22). The Phoenix Terrace is an important image in the original text. In the traditional culture of China, the phoenix was regarded as a good omen, so the Phoenix Terraces were built in many places all over the country. Literati of all dynasties created works that aimed for praising the Phoenix Terrace one after another. The Phoenix Terrace mentioned in the original text is located in Jiankang, the capital of the Southern Dynasty. It has the greatest influence among the Phoenix Terraces in all dynasties, because the poem "Climbing the Phoenix Terrace in Jinling" written by Li Bai has spread through the ages and has a long reputation. Wu Palaces refer to the palaces built by Sun Quan in Jinling during the Three Kingdoms Period. The Jin Dynasty is divided into the West Jin while "晋代" refers to the East Jin. The capitals of State Wu and East Jin both were established in Jinling. Both of them flourished for a time and then declined. However, Pound does not translate this term appropriately, only translating the title "登金陵凤凰台 Climbing the Phoenix Terrace in Jinling" into "The City of Choan". His translation lacks the important image of climbing high and looking far away. He translated "吴宫 Wu Palace" into "dynastic house of the Go" and "晋代 Jin Dynasty" into "Shin". Payne translated the title into "the Phoenix Tower", and "吴宫花草 flowers and grass in Wu Palace" into "garden of Wu" and "晋代 Jin Dynasty" into "Chin". These three nouns all represent rich historical and cultural images in Chinese, but there are no comments in the translation of Pound, Payne and Xu. The translation of Xu is ambiguous, translating "吴宫 Wu Palace" into "ruined palace" and "晋代衣冠 great figures of West Jin" into "ancient sages in caps and gowns". It is undeniable that

Xu's translation is full of poetic beauty, but the expression of beauty in image is not accurate enough. Therefore, English readers will not be able to fully understand the beauty of image in the original text. Sun used the Phoenix Terrace, Wu Palace and Jin in the translated work. His translation not only accurately translates these nouns, but also contains detailed footnotes, which convey the beauty of image most accurately.

3.2.3.4 Beauty in Emotion

Yu (2000) believes that poetry of Tang concretely and meticulously reflects all aspects of the spiritual life of various types of characters in the Tang Dynasty. There are three kinds of emotions in the original poem. There is a sharp contrast between the leisure phoenix in the past and the bleak scene today, which leads the poet to feel melancholy; the changes were dramatic between the boom of former dynasties and the desolate ancient graves, and only Nature is everlasting; the poet worries about the future of the emperor and the country. The first two feelings are conveyed suitably by the four translators. In the last line, "愁 (*melancholy*)" is the core of emotions in the full text. It expressed that Li Bai was grief for the country and the emperor who was surrounded by crafty and fawning eunuchs. Pound translates it as "*sad*", which is not accurate. It is more accurate for Payne to translate it as "*grief*". Sun chooses to translate it as "*dismay*", and Xu illustrates it as "*saddens my heart*". Comparatively speaking, the translation of Pound, Sun and Xu accurately convey Li Bai's sorrow for his country and the emperor.

3.2.3.5 Beauty in Connotation

Beauty in connotation is one of the most prominent aesthetic features in Chinese poetry. Translators should be aware of the great charm of this beauty and properly reproduce it in the translated poem (Wang, 2015). Wandering clouds block out the brightness of the sun (浮云蔽日) implicates that eunuchs are in power, while talented people are not, and the poet is worried about the future of the country. All the four translators retain this connotative beauty in their translations by literal translation.

3.2.3.6 Beauty in Diction

The word "落" has a dynamic sense of space. "半落" means that only half of the mountain seems to be exposed on the ground, and the other half falls into the blue sky, surrounded by the clouds. "*Fall through the far heaven*" in the translation of Pound does not express accurately the meaning of "半落". Moreover, "*Heaven*" is obviously a word connected with Western religion and culture, so it is not suitable to be used here. "长安不见" (Not seeing Chang'an) echoes the word "登" (climbing) in the title, integrating the infinite grief with the Yangtze River, the green hills and the distant sky. Pound translated the title as "*The City of Choan*". As a result, there is no echo between "*The City of Choan*" and "登". "愁" is translated as "*sad*", which cannot accurately express the poet's grief. It is more appropriate for Payne to translate "三山半落" into "*Half of these three mountains*". "三山" is the name of a mountain with peaks, so Payne translated it as "*three mountains*", which

is not correct. Sun and Xu's translations of "三山" into "*Tri-Peaked Mount*" and "*The three-peak'd mountain*" are accurate enough. It is also accurate for them to translate "半落" into "*half pointed through the azure sky*" and "*half lost in azure sky*" respectively. In terms of beauty in diction, the two Chinese translators have done better.

3.2.3.7 Beauty in Allusion

Waley (1918) believes that allusions are a bad habit of Chinese poets, and he is disgusted with allusions. While Wang (2015) believes that allusions contain rich characteristics of Chinese traditional culture and proper allusions can make works concise, implicit and profound. In the poem, Li Bai quoted the allusion in Lu Jia's "*Xin Yu*" (新语) that "*The floating clouds cover the sun and the moon implied that the Emperor Xuanzong of Tang was deceived by the evil villain and kept at a distance from the virtuous ministers.*" (邪臣之蔽贤，犹浮云之障日月也). Floating clouds are compared to the villains, and the bright sun is viewed as the emperor. The original capital of the Jin Dynasty was Chang'an and later the ruling class of the Jin Dynasty were forced to escape from Chang'an. The Yuan Emperor of Jin changed the capital to Jinling. This is very similar to the situation that prince Li Heng of the Tang Dynasty had no choice to succeed to the throne in Lingwu instead of Chang'an because of the An-Shi Rebellion, which was launched by An Lushan and Shi Siming against the royal family of the Tang Dynasty; therefore, it was not only a civil war but also the turning point from prosperity to decline of the Tang Dynasty. Consequently, the last two lines of Li Bai's poem "*The floating clouds cover the sun*" also refers to the fact that Emperor Xuanzong spoiled Yang Guifei and her brother Yang Guozhong. Emperor Xuanzong neglected the imperial government, so that the national government was successively controlled by Li Linfu and Yang Guozhong, which led to the An-Shi Rebellion and Chang'an fell into the controls of Hu people. Li Bai wrote this poem out of pure grief and anxiety for his country when he was expelled because the emperor was convinced of villain's slander. The moment he boarded the Phoenix Terrace, he could not see Chang'an and his grief and anxiety intensified. Although Li Bai has the desire to be free from life, he is always concerned about politics and social life.

3.2.3.8 Beauty in Gestalt

The above seven specific beauties can be analyzed in detail, but the analysis of beauty is by no means completely isolated (Wang, 2015). Moreover, the above seven specific beauties cannot cover all the connotations of beauty in different poems. Gestalt beauty in this paper points to the unmentioned beauties, which together with the previous seven beauties constitute the complete "Eight Beauties". For example, the beauty of numbers and the beauty of perspective conversion belong to the category of "beauty in gestalt" (Wang, 2015). The original poem "三山" and "一水" contains the beauty of numbers. There are number three in "三山" and number one in "一水". All four translators have used the number three in their translations, but only Pound's translation and Payne's

translation used the number two to take the place of the number one. They all used "two streams" and recreated the beauty of numbers.

Through the analysis and study of the above four translations, and based on the "Harmony-guided Three-Level Poetry Translation Criteria", the authors try to give their own translation as follows:

Climbing the Phoenix Terrace in Jinling
The phoenix roamed around the Phoenix Terrace.
The phoenix left, the Terrace bare; the river runs.
Plants in Wu palace covered deserted alleys;
Graves from Jin became desolate hills and gullies.
Mountain Three stands loftily beyond the blue sky.
A sandbar makes Yangtze two streams; Egrets low fly.
Wandering clouds block out the brightness of the sun.
The capital Chang'an is not seen and I grieve.

3. Conclusion

Through Dr. Wang Feng's "Harmony-Guided Three Level Translation Criteria", this paper makes an analysis on the four translations of Li Bai's "Climbing the Phoenix Terrace in Jinling". Under the background of globalization, the communication and exchange of cultures in the world are becoming more and more frequent. This paper hopes to provide inspiration for the translation practice of Chinese classical poetry, promote the spread of Chinese culture, and help foreign readers appreciate the charm of Chinese literature and culture.

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