



AN ANALYSIS OF TWO ENGLISH VERSIONS OF TUNE: *CHOU NU ER WRITTEN ON THE WALL ON MY WAY TO BOSHAN* FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF FUNCTIONAL EQUIVALENCE THEORY

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Abstract:

Song Ci is a treasure in the history of Chinese classical literature. As one of the representative works of Song Ci by Xin Qiji, a bold and unconstrained poet, *Tune: Chou Nu Er Written on the Wall on My Way to Boshan* has been favored by many translators at home and abroad, and there are many English versions in existence. The translation theory of "Functional Equivalence" points out that "*Translating consists in reproducing in the receptor language the closest natural equivalent of the source-language message, first in terms of meaning and secondly in terms of style*". Translation contains not only lexical equivalence, but also semantic equivalence, stylistic equivalence, and conveys superficial lexical information and deep cultural information. Poetry stands on the beauty of sound, meaning and form, and also has a great cultural connotation. Therefore, it is necessary to convey the source language information and reproduce the cultural connotation in translation. Based on this, this paper takes two English versions of *Tune: Chou Nu Er Written on the Wall on My Way to Boshan* as the research object, analyzes the functional equivalence in poetry translation from three aspects: meaning, sound and form, and discusses the guiding significance and rationality of functional equivalence theory in the translation of Song Ci.

Keywords: Song Ci; Xin Qiji; functional equivalence

1. Introduction

In ancient China, whether it is an expression of "*ambition*" or "*emotion*", poetry is used to express emotions. Ancient literati often used poetry to express their inner feelings when they were frustrated. Nowadays, cultural exchanges around the world are highly frequent, and the spread of Chinese traditional culture is in full swing, while the

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translation of classics is an indispensable and important way to promote Chinese traditional culture. Among the voluminous ancient books and records, the literary status and literary value of Song Ci are extremely high, with strong representativeness and high research value. Translating is a bridge for the transmission of Chinese culture and the only way for the export of Chinese traditional culture. Eugene Nida's functional equivalence theory provides a good theoretical basis for poetry translation. As one of the representative works of Xin Qiji, *Tune: Chou Nu Er Written on the Wall on My Way to Boshan* has been favored by many translators at home and abroad, and there are many English versions in existence.

Based on the theory of functional equivalence, this paper will make a comparative analysis of Xu Yuanchong's version and Lin Yutang's version to study their functional equivalence in three aspects: meaning, sound and form, as well as to find out the rationality of functional equivalence theory in the translation of Song Ci, hoping to make a modest contribution to the spread of Chinese traditional culture.

2. Xin Qiji and His Tune: *Chou Nu Er Written on the Wall on My Way to Boshan*

Xin Qiji (1140-1207), a patriotic poet in the Southern Song Dynasty, was also an outstanding politician and strategist. His original ambition was not to become a literatus, but to become a soldier and defend his country. Although he was devoted to regaining the country's lost land and fighting enemies, the Southern Song Dynasty court was timid and afraid of war. Therefore, many of Xin Qiji's works express his unfulfilled ambition for he has no way to serve his decaying country, and his dissatisfaction with the court of the incompetent Southern Song Dynasty. *Tune: Chou Nu Er Written on the Wall on My Way to Boshan* was written when he was impeached to the Dai lake (Jiang Qian, 2020). This ci poem expresses the author's pain of being oppressed, excluded and unable to serve the country. The whole ci poem highlights the word "愁" (sorrow), which is used as a clue throughout the whole poem. It is exquisitely conceived, sincere and tactful in feelings, simple in words but profound in meaning, and memorable (Hu Yongzhong, 2017).

3. Brief Introduction of Functional Equivalence Theory

As we all know, Eugene A. Nida, a famous American translation theorist, is also the "father of modern translation theory" in the west. His functional equivalence translation theory has made great contributions to translation studies all over the world (Zhu Haiye, 2021). In the following, we will elaborate on the emergence of functional equivalence theory and its feasibility in poetry translation.

1) Generation of functional equivalence theory

Eugene A. Nida is the first one to put forward the functional equivalence theory. The emergence of this theory has a great influence on translation both at home and abroad. He defined translation as, "*Translating consists in reproducing in the receptor language the closest natural equivalent of the source-language message, first in terms of meaning*

and secondly in terms of style" (Nida, 1969). In this definition, "closest" means closeness to the information of the source language, and "natural" means equivalence of expressions in the target language. Combining the above two is a fulfillment of equivalence. In order to avoid people's misunderstanding of the word "dynamic", Nida further developed his theory. In 1986, in his book *From One Language to Another: Functional Equivalence in Bible Translating*, he put forward the translation principle of "functional equivalence" from the perspective of language function, that is, "the translated text and the original text should be functionally equivalent, not formally equivalent" (Nida, 1986). Therefore, "functional equivalence" has a wider feasible range.

Eugene Nida's "functional equivalence" can be divided into three levels: First, linguistic translation, that is the linguistic equivalence in morphology and syntax; Second, communicative equivalence in translation, that is the equivalence of language meaning in their transformation; Third, social semiotic equivalence, that is the equivalence at the social and cultural level. In short, the purpose of "functional equivalence" is to achieve a high degree of equivalence between the translated text and the original text. When understanding and appreciating the translated text, the responses of the target readers and of the original readers should be basically consistent. However, Nida believes that this level of the translation may never be achieved, but it can be seen as a translation goal. Translators should make the translated works infinitely close to the original works. In fact, different translations represent different degrees of equivalence (Wu Minhuan, 2011).

2) The feasibility of functional equivalence theory in poetry translation

Eugene Nida's translation theory of "functional equivalence" is one of the early western translation theories introduced in the domestic translation field. In recent years, the theory of functional equivalence has been widely discussed in domestic academic circles of translation. This theory is applicable to the translation of various text types, and it is of great significance to domestic translation research and practice, including poetry translation practice. "Functional equivalence" not only refers to the linguistic equivalence between the target text and the original text in simple words and sentences, but also emphasizes a functional equivalence in linguistic, literary and cultural contexts. Although there are great differences in cultural and aesthetic values between Chinese and English poetry, translators can still achieve the goal of "functional equivalence" between the original poem and the translated poem to the greatest extent according to this translation theory. Nida's "functional equivalence" is a kind of relatively flexible dynamic equivalence (Nida, 1999). In this paper, the authors select two versions from different translators on *Tune: Chou Nu Er Written on the Wall on My Way to Boshan*, trying to analyze how the two translators achieve a functional equivalence with the source text from three aspects: meaning equivalence, phonological equivalence and formal equivalence, so as to supplement the application of functional equivalence theory in poetry translation.

4. Analysis of the Two Versions of Tune: *Chou Nu Er Written on the Wall on My Way to Boshan* from the Perspective of Functional Equivalence

Table 1

Original Text	Xu's version	Lin's version
少年不识愁滋味	While young, I knew no grief I could not bear	In my younger days, I had tasted only gladness
爱上层楼 爱上层楼	I'd like to go upstairs I'd like to go upstairs	But loved to mount the top floor But loved to mount the top floor
为赋新词强说愁	To write new verses with a false despair	To write a song pretending sadness
而今识尽愁滋味	I know what grief is now that I am old	And now I've tasted Sorrow's flavors, bitter and sour
欲说还休 欲说还休	I would not have it told I would not have it told	And can't find a word And can't find a word
却道天凉好个秋	But only say I'm glad that autumn's cold	But merely say, "what a golden autumn hour!"

1) Functional equivalence of meaning

In the first line of the first stanza, Xu used "*could not bear*" to express that young people's melancholy can never be too heavy. Lin used "*I had tasted only gladness*" to express that Xin Qiji only knows happiness when he was young. As far as Xin Qiji's own experience is concerned, when he was young, he was full of ambition. He wanted to resist the country's enemy and restore the lost land with full confidence, not afraid of difficulties at all. It is more appropriate to take it literally here. In translation, Xu used an amplification while Lin's translation transforms the image of "*not knowing sorrow*" into "*only knows happiness*". The two translators choose different emphases of expression. The former expression does not fully convey the poet's optimism and confidence, while the latter uses the image of "*gladness*" to contrast the "*sorrow*" in the original text, which changed the meaning of the poem.

In the second line of the first stanza, the phrase Xu used is "*go upstairs*", but it was translated by Lin as "*mount the top floor*". The ancients always expressed their grief when they climbed high (Jiang Qian, 2020). In the original poem, the poet used "爱上层楼, 爱上层楼" (literally, love to go up a floor), a way of classic emotion expression, to trigger a poetic feeling, implying that he loves climbing high to express his sorrow. Lin's translation has one more logical conjunction "*but*" than Xu's translation, which forms a turning contrast between "不识愁滋味" (literally, not knowing sorrow's flavor) in the previous line and "爱上层楼" in this line. First, adding logical conjunctions is more in line with the grammatical rules of the target language; Secondly, for the target readers, it enhances the logical connection and readability of poetry. Moreover, judging from the choice of words in the target language, Lin's translation of "*mount the top floor*" can promote the poetic image of the translated poems more than Xu's translation of "*go upstairs*". Besides, Xu's translation is to match the rhythm of the whole poem, and the spelling of "*go upstairs*" is different from the fixed "*go upstairs*" in the target language.

Therefore, Lin's translation of this line is better in terms of poetic image and semantic transmission.

In the last line of the first stanza, Xu used "*false despair*" and Lin used "*pretending sadness*". The meaning of this line is that the poet reluctantly says something about his sorrow when he has no real feelings about it. Because poems with sorrow are easily appreciated by people, so he creates feelings in his writing to express his sorrow. In the processing of this line, Xu's translation uses a noun structure, while Lin's translation uses a gerund structure, which makes the poet's image more vivid. However, Lin's translation missed the "新" (new) image in the original poem. Although the translated poem was vivid, it didn't achieve equivalence in meaning transmission.

Xu translated the first line in the second stanza into "*I know what grief is now that I am old*" and Lin translated it into "*and now I've tasted Sorrow's flavors, bitter and sour*". As the poet grows older, his experience becomes deeper and deeper, and he then has a profound experience of sorrow even to the extent of knowing all the sorrow around the world. Xu's translation highlights the growing age of the poet, while Lin's translation adds "*bitter and sour*" at the end of the sentence to turn the poet's feelings of sorrow into a more concrete perception. In the translation of this line, the two translators, on the premise of equivalence with the original text, respectively chose images to render, which added a different flavor to the translated poem and achieved functional equivalence in meaning.

Xu translated the second line as "*I would not have it told*" when Lin translated it as "*and can't find a word*". The meaning of "欲说还休" is "*wanting to say it but not saying it*", which is used when someone has difficulty expressing complicated feelings. So, we can see that Xu's translation shows the meaning of wanting to say something but not saying it, while Lin's translation shows that emotion is complicated and difficult to express. The images of the two translators here are not completely equivalent, so it can be seen that in a limited number of words, the expression effect of conciseness and richness in meaning is difficult to achieve in English as it achieves in Chinese.

Xu translated the last line as "*but only say I'm glad that autumn's cold*" and Lin translated it as "*but merely say, 'what a golden autumn hour!'*". The writing background of the original text was that Xin Qiji's early ambition was exhausted by the weak and incompetent Southern Song Dynasty court, so he was full of anger but had nowhere to escape. Although he was worried about his country, he couldn't disclose the weakness of the court. All kinds of emotions and worries haunted the poet's mind, but all he could talk about is the weather. The "凉" (cold) here represented the poet's disappointment with the Southern Song Dynasty court to some extent (Jiang Qian, 2020). "天凉好个秋" here literally means "*a cool autumn*". In dealing with the image of "凉", Xu chose "*cold*" to express it, but "*cold*" is more appropriate to describe extremely cold weather rather than autumn here. Lin's translation omitted the image of "凉", but added a "*golden*" to show the pleasant autumn, which lost the original image and emotional sustenance of the poem. In dealing with the tone of this sentence, Xu used declarative sentences while Lin used exclamatory sentences. The poem here also has a kind of helpless lyricism, so the

latter is more equivalent in the expression of feelings. Therefore, in this line, Xu's translation is equivalent in conveying the meaning, and Lin's translation is equivalent in expressing the poet's emotion.

2) Functional equivalence of phonology

It is a matter of course that poetry should be translated with rhyme. As long as the original poem uses rhyme, the translator has no right to deprive the original poet of his phonological arrangement, including end rhyme and in-line rhyme. It is not advisable to translate poems into prose, and the translated poems and the original poems should be basically equivalent in phonological arrangement (Li Zhengshuan, 2004). The poem itself has a harmonious rhyme on the whole, with the end rhyme of "ou" in the former stanza and "iu" in the latter stanza. The first line of the former stanza and the latter stanza are both rhymed with "ei", and the rhyme scheme of the whole poem is ABBB,ACCC which is very catchy to read, reflecting the sound beauty of Song Ci (Xing Chonghui, 2022). The rhythm in Xu's translation is AAAA, BBBB, and Lin used the rhyme scheme of ABBA, CDDC. Although both translators' translations are very beautiful in rhyme, translators should avoid the harm of the poem's meaning when they try to achieve a harmonious rhyme. For example, Xu changed "go upstairs" into "go upstair", and "凉" was expressed by "cold". As to Lin's translation, he omitted the "凉" image and added the image of "golden hour" in the last line. On the whole, however, the two translators have achieved phonological equivalence with the original poem, which is worth learning for later translators.

3) Functional equivalence in form

First of all, the formal equivalence of Xu's translation is more obvious. The length of the lines translated by Xu is very close to that of the original ci poem. Although Lin's version is also very neat, the length of the short lines translated by Xu is closer to that of the original poem, and the length of each long line in the translated poem is also very matching. Secondly, there are too many conjunctions used in Lin's translation. There are 8 lines in the translated poems, among which 3 lines begin with "But". Moreover, 3 sentences begin with "And". Taken together, the translated ci poem is in order, but there are too many repetitions, which makes the choice of words somewhat restricted. Therefore, on the whole, Xu's translation of poems is better in terms of the functional equivalence in form.

5. Conclusion

This paper compares and appreciates two English versions of *Tune: Chou Nu Er Written on the Wall on My Way to Boshan* translated by Xu Yuanchong and Lin Yutang from three aspects: meaning, phonology and form, and finds that Lin's language in translation is well organized, and conforms to the reading habits of the target readers, which also has outstanding ideographic meanings. Besides retaining some important images of the original poem, Xu's translation is superior in terms of functional equivalence in form. Both translators have profound attainments in the translation of poems, which can make

the target language readers better understand the musical beauty, connotation and significance of the original poem. It can be seen that the theory of functional equivalence is reasonable to a great extent for the translation of classical ci poems that pay attention to metrical patterns, and it has a guiding significance for the translation practice and evaluation of ci poems.

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Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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