



**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
"LOOKING AT THE MOUNT SKY GATE"**

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Abstract:

The poetry of Tang is a kind of classic literature of China and famous historical heritage. Taking the "Harmony-guided Three-Level poetry translation criteria" as the theoretical basis, this paper compares the translations of two translators of different styles in different periods of Li Bai's "Looking at the Mount Sky Gate" from the macro, middle and micro levels. As for the Chinese translator Xu Yuanchong, his version has high formal beauty and musical beauty. Besides the expression of a few images, he also gave a good consideration to "the beauty of numbers". Rewi Alley's translation is a free verse, but he tries to approach the original poem in terms of meaning. By the analysis of the above two versions, the authors endeavor to give their own version according to the "Harmony-guided Three-Level poetry translation criteria". The translation study of "Looking at the Mount Sky Gate" can enrich the theory of "Harmony-guided Three-Level poetry translation criteria" and promote the spread of Chinese literature and culture.

Keywords: Tang poetry translation, Harmony-guided Three-Level poetry translation criteria, "Looking at the Mount Sky Gate", Li Bai

1. Introduction

The famous poet Li Bai in the Tang Dynasty created numerous poems, which are treasures of Chinese culture. Scholars at home and abroad have conducted a lot of

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research about them. Domestic scholars Xu Yuanchong and Gu Zhengkun have translated most of Li Bai's poems and songs, and foreign scholars have also translated a large number of them. Although the translation of Tang poetry is at the forefront and plays an important part in the process of Chinese culture spreading to the West, it didn't change from scattered and selected translations to systematic collections of Tang poetry until the first half of the 20th century. Now, it still needs promoting.

As Dr Wang Feng (2015) said, when we face six kinds of disharmony in the translation of Chinese and English poems, we need to provide guidelines and solutions for poetry translation. The "Harmony-guided Three-Level poetry translation criteria" includes three levels called "macro, middle and micro" levels to analyse and evaluate poetry translations from multiple angles, guide poetry translation practice and criticism, and promote the exchange of Chinese and Western traditional literature and culture. This article will analyze two English versions of Li Bai's "Looking at the Mount Sky Gate" based on the "Harmony-Guided Three-Level poetry translation criteria" to strengthen the study on the Tang poetry translation. At last, by the analysis of the above two versions, the authors endeavor to give their own version according to the "Harmony-guided Three-Level poetry translation criteria". The translation study of "Looking at the Mount Sky Gate" can enrich the theory of "Harmony-guided Three-Level poetry translation criteria" and promote the spread of Chinese literature and culture.

2. Harmony-Guided Three-Level Poetry Translation Criteria

2.1 Macro level: "Harmony" theory

"Harmony" theory emphasizes the beauty of internal harmony covering various aesthetic forms, and finds contradiction and unity of harmony in the translation of poetry.

2.2 Middle level: similarity of styles, senses and artistic conceptions

"Similarity of styles" means that translators should not deviate from the original style and translate poetry arbitrarily when insisting on the translator's subjectivity. The "similarity of senses" requires translators to pay attention to the meaning of the original poem when translating poetry. In translation practice, we need to consider the cultural differences between high and low contexts in both Chinese and English. The "similarity of artistic conceptions" refers to the fact that the artistic feelings acquired by the readers of the translated poems are similar to those of the original readers. The artistic conception is both real and virtual, and the communication of the artistic conception needs organic combination of different translation strategies.

2.1 Micro level: Eight Beauties Criteria

The "Eight Beauties Criteria" cover "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". "Beauty in form" refers to the external form of the poem

itself. The number, arrangement, length, indentation, and structure of the poem line determine whether the poem has a high formal beauty. "Beauty in musicality" refers to the beauty formed by the syllables, tone and rhythm in poetry. It occupies a very important position in Chinese poetry, especially the modern poems of the Tang Dynasty. "Beauty in image" refers to the organic combination of subjective affection and external imagery. In the translation of poetry, it refers to the visual beauty formed by the vivid and perceptible images in reality or imagination or the perceptual components of the imagery group. It is particularly common in landscape poetry. "Beauty in emotion" refers to the thoughts and feelings expressed by poets, such as joy, anger, sorrow, love, surprise, regret, sorrow and sadness, which are common in epic poems, parting poems, love poems and reward poems. "Beauty in connotation" is one of the most significant aesthetic traits in Chinese poetry. Most of the poetry is relatively obscure, with many hints and extra-verbal meanings, forming a unique sense of beauty. "Beauty in diction" requires translators to respect the original author in their creation so that the language form at the word level is suitable for the content to be expressed. "Beauty in allusion" refers to the beauty that allusions in poetry produce in readers' minds. "Beauty in gestalt" refers to the grasp of the overall beauty of poetry, requiring translators to integrate the various beauties of poetry, reproducing the beauty of poetry as a whole (Wang, 2015).

3. Appreciation of the Original Text of "Looking at the Mount Sky Gate"

Li Bai is brave and free in his life. He spent most of the time visiting famous mountains and rivers and described the beautiful landscape in his poems (Huang& Jin,1980). "Looking at the Mount Sky Gate" is a famous poem written by Li Bai to describe the natural scenery. The poem is as follows:

天门中断楚江开，碧水东流至此回。
两岸青山相对出，孤帆一片日边来。

"Looking at the Mount Sky Gate" is a poem created when Li arrived in the Mount Sky Gate on the way to Jiangdong (Yu,2014). This poem depicts what the poet saw at the Mount Sky Gate on the boat: the first two lines describe the magnificence of the Mount Sky Gate and the mighty flow of the river with the method of narrative; the second two lines depict the view from the gap among the green mountains on both sides of the bank, which shows a dynamic beauty. Through the description for the scenery of the Mount Sky Gate, the whole poem praises the magic and magnificence of Nature, expresses the author's optimistic and magnificent feelings when he first came out of Bashu, and shows his free spirit. The artistic conception of the work is broad, and it can turn the static into the dynamic and the dynamic into the static, showing a good interest.

4. Comparative Analysis of the English Versions of "Looking at the Mount Sky Gate" under the Principle of "Harmony-guided Three-Level Poetry Translation Criteria"

In the following part, the authors will use the "Harmony-guided Three-Level poetry translation criteria", especially the "Micro-level Eight Beauties Theory" as the theoretical guidance to compare and analyse the two translations of different styles in China and the West. The two translations were from Rewi Alley (1980) and Xu Yuanchong (2007).

The first version: Looking at the Tianmen Hills (Alley, 1980)
At Tienmen, it was as if the hills were cleft and the waters flowed through,

*first turning north, then going east again;
on both banks, green hills facing each other;
then down from the gorges came a boat, while just then rays of the sun flooded the
scene, making it appear that the boat had come out of the sun itself.*

The second version: Mount Heaven's Gate Viewed from Afar (Xu, 2007)

*Breaking Mount Heaven's Gate, the great River rolls through,
Its east flowing green billows, hurled back here, turn north.
From the two river banks thrust out the mountains blue,
Leaving the sun behind, a lonely sail comes forth.*

4.1 Macro Level

At the macro level, the two versions can express the meaning of the original poem clearly. However, there are still some problems. Firstly, the syllables of every line in the first version aren't the same, which makes the poem look scattered. In the second version, there are 12 syllables in every line, which can achieve the "harmony" in general. Furthermore, the style of the first version is like that of Western poems that don't have the characteristics of Chinese poems, which can't be up to the standard of "harmony". The style of the second version is close to that of Chinese poems. All in all, it is difficult to achieve the "harmony" standard at the macro level because there are so many differences between different languages and cultures.

4.2 Middle Level

At the middle level, the translator has to make the translated poetry faithful to the meaning of the original poetry, so that the readers of the translated language can feel the same artistic conception and beauty when reading the translated poem. From the perspective of "the similarity of styles", the first version has some creative understanding, while the second version doesn't deviate from the style of the original poem. In terms of "the similarity of senses", there are some false meanings in the first version. For example, "碧水东流至此回" means that the east-rolling blue billows turn

north here. However, Rewi Alley translated it as "first turning north, then going east again". Obviously, the meaning has deviated from the original poem, which doesn't achieve the standard of "the similarity of senses". Considering "the similarity of artistic conceptions", the Chinese translator Xu Yuanchong seems to understand the thoughts, feeling and contexts better. Artistic equivalence ranks in the first position rather than formal equivalence.

4.3 Micro Level: Eight Beauties Criteria

About "beauty in form", "*Looking at the Mount Sky Gate*" has four lines with seven characters in every line, which have a high beauty in form. However, because of the differences between the Chinese and Western culture, Rewi Alley's version doesn't have the same form as the original poem. Xu Yuanchong's version can be up to the standard of "beauty in form", which has 12 syllables in every line with unified form.

As for "beauty in musicality", the first version doesn't have an end rhyme scheme, while the second version uses the rhyming scheme of ABAB, such as, "north" and "forth", which achieve the standard of "beauty in musicality". As Charles Kwong (2009) once says, "Rhyme performs significant artistic functions." The harmony of rhythm can make poetry have a high degree of musical beauty.

Considering "beauty in image", "*Looking at the Mount Sky Gate*" describes the natural scenery, so there are many images in the poem. According to James Liu (1962), the poetic imagery consists of "single imagery" and "compound imagery". "天门" is a single image. Rewi Alley translated it as "Tianmen", while Xu Yuanchong translated it as "Heaven's Gate". "Tianmen" doesn't let readers understand the situation of the mountain, while "Heaven's Gate" has a sense of Western religion that is easy to make readers misunderstand. Therefore, the two different versions don't achieve the standard of "beauty in image".

In terms of "beauty in emotion", "*Looking at the Mount Sky Gate*" expresses brave and free feelings by describing the natural scenery. With the background of the prosperous Tang Dynasty, Li Bai show the pursuit of free spirit with the poem (Zheng, 2015). Rewi Alley translated "天门中断楚江开" as "At Tienmen, it was as if the hills were cleft and the waters flowed through" and Xu Yuanchong "Breaking Mount Heaven's Gate, the great River rolls through." In the second version, Xu Yuanchong uses "break" and "roll" to express the pursuit of free spirit better than "cleft" and "flow" in the first version.

About "beauty in connotation", "出" in the line "两岸青山相对出" has a rich meaning, which describes vividly the situation that the mountains on two banks compete and contend with each other. Xu Yuanchong uses "thrust out" to show the rich connotation of "出" in the poem. The "face" in Rewi Alley's version can't well express the connotation of "出".

As for "beauty in diction", "日边来" in the original poem means that a boat comes here from the direction of the sun. Rewi Alley uses a lot of words to explain "日边来",

which are "while just then rays of the sun flooded the scene, making it appear that the boat had come out of the sun itself." The diction isn't simple and beautiful. Compared with that of Rewi Alley, Xu Yuanchong's version is more simple and vivid, which is "leaving the sun behind". The second version not only uses fewer words, but also can make people imagine the scenery better.

Considering "beauty in allusion", Dr Wang Feng (2015) proposes that translators do not have to always translate the allusions in the original poems, but if the allusions are very important, they cannot be ignored or adapted. Regardless of using the domestication or foreignization strategy, annotations within or outside the text can be considered. There are no allusions in the poem.

The "beauty in gestalt", as we state in this paper, refers to the unmentioned beauties, which together with the previous seven beauties constitute the complete "Eight Beauties". As Dr Wang Feng (2015) says, "It is of great significance to grasp the reappearance of these beauties as a whole and to reproduce the beauty of gestalt in the translated poem." For example, "the beauty of numbers" is a kind of "beauty in gestalt". In the original poem, "两岸青山" and "孤帆一片" have the beauty of specific numbers. "两岸青山" shows that the mountains on two banks compete with and face each other. "孤帆一片" shows that the boat is lonely and the river is quiet. Rewi Alley translated them as "both banks" and "a boat", while Xu Yuanchong translated them as "two river banks" and "a lonely sail". Compared with Rewi Alley, Xu Yuanchong's version uses "two river banks" and "a lonely sail" to express "the beauty of numbers" better.

Through the analysis and study of the above two translations, and based on the "Harmony-guided Three-Level poetry translation criteria", the authors try to give their own translation as follows:

Looking at the Mount Sky Gate

Written by Li Bai

Translated by Wang Congcong and Wang Feng

Mount Sky Gate breaks and the River flows ;

Here turn north the east-rolling blue billows.

Green hills on river banks face to face ;

A boat alone comes from the glowing place.

5. Conclusion

Taking the "Harmony-guided Three-Level poetry translation criteria" as the theoretical basis, this paper compares the translations of two translators of different styles in different periods of Li Bai's "Looking at the Mount Sky Gate" from the macro, middle and micro levels. As for the Chinese translator Xu Yuanchong, his version has high formal beauty and musical beauty. Besides the expression of a few images, he also gave good

consideration to "the beauty of numbers". Rewi Alley's translation is a free verse, but he tries to approach the original poem in terms of meaning.

There are still some issues and shortcomings in this paper. The authors' understanding of the original poem and the translated poem may not be good enough. There might be a series of other issues to be further studied. In general, the "Harmony-guided Three-Level poetry translation criteria" theory as a standard to guide poetry translation practice and criticism has its own rationality and feasibility. As Ma (2018) advocated the realization of cultural confidence in poetry translation, the authors also hope that scholars have some new findings to deepen the theory to promote the spread of traditional Chinese culture in the near future.

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