

A Contrastive Analysis of the English Versions of Spring Morning

Lun Zhou*, Hongkun Yang

College of Foreign Languages, North China University of Science and Technology, Tangshan, Hebei, 063210, China

**Corresponding author*

Keywords: Language, poetry translation, translation criticism, Spring Morning

Abstract: Poetry is a kind of language art form with rhythm, metre and emotional color. It expresses the author's thoughts and feelings in a highly concise, free and unrestrained way with rich imagination, bright rhythm, elegant rhythm language and clear line arrangement form, and reflects the social life in a concentrated way. As for poetry translation, it is not only an accurate translation of the content expressed in the original text, but also an expression of the indescribable beauty contained in the rhythm and rhyme. However, it is the perfect combination of content and form that can fully convey the beauty of poetry to readers. Without any part of it, it is doomed to become incomplete. From the perspective of translation criticism, this paper discusses and analyzes the two English versions of Spring Morning, in order to provide theoretical support for the translator's translation practice.

1. Introduction to Poetry Translation

Poetry translation is significantly different from the translation of fiction, prose, drama and film subtitles, which is determined by the characteristics of this literary genre. First of all, in terms of language, poetic language is highly concise and contains a lot of information in the unit structure. Due to the requirements of rhythm, prosody and rhyme, its structure is very different from the general structure of language. Secondly, poetry is one of the highest forms in literature, which is an organic unity of sound, form and meaning. In addition, the meaning of poetry (especially lyric poetry) often has to be found between the lines, and many imaginative elements of the poet's writing are included. Therefore, poetry translation requires the translator to have more systematic language knowledge, extensive cultural background knowledge, and dabble in history, geography, and cultural allusions. Chen Jie noted that as the sublimation of literature and the concentrated embodiment of language, poetry has always been connected with aesthetic, because the essence of poetry translation is to convey the beauty of poetry^[1]. Zhai Zihui believed that poetry translation is the re-creation of art and the art of beautification and its highest standard is to achieve the combination of beauty of sound, form and meaning^[2]. Therefore, poetry translation should be flexible, creative and adaptable.

2. Introduction to Spring Morning

The poem “Spring Morning” is smooth, simple and natural, yet has a profound meaning. However, there are many different opinions about the feelings expressed in the poem. For example, Ni Chao interpreted “Spring Morning” from a metaphorical perspective because he believed that “poetry is metaphor”^[3]. Tan Xiaochun and Huang Guowen pointed out that many researchers consider the life experiences of the author Meng Haoran when explaining the meaning conveyed in the poem “Spring Morning”. They interpret the poem based on his specific life experiences^[4]. Some people believe that “Spring Morning” expresses the poet’s love and compassion for spring, while others agree that it is a poem of spring hatred, in which the poet laments the passing of time and the lack of success and fame, combined with Meng Haoran’s life experience. If the translator has a different understanding of the poem’s emotional intent, the translation will also differ. The poem depicts the beauty of spring in fresh, lively and bright language, and expresses the strong spring feeling in the poet’s heart. Although the brushwork is light, the mood is rich and sincere, leaving an endless flavor of birds talking without heart and flowers falling with love.

3. Xu Yuanchong and Weng Xianliang in the English Translation of Ancient Poems

The English translations of Chinese ancient poems have gone through more than four hundred years in the process of opposite translation techniques, systems and features, such as literal translation and free translation, likeness in form and likeness in spirit, prose and rhyme. In this long history of translation shining with the essence of Chinese culture, there are two major schools of translators who have led the direction of translating ancient poems like “trend-setter”: Xu Yuanchong, the representative of the rhyming school of ancient poems, and Weng Xianliang, the leader of the prose school.

For a long time, based on the understanding of the aesthetic characteristics of ancient poetry and the standards upheld by translation criticism, rhyme translated poetry has been regarded as the “orthodoxy” of ancient poetry translation, and there are many followers. While prose translated poetry has flowed into the “collateral tributaries” of ancient poetry translation because it breaks the formal structure of the original text and does not deliberately pursue branch and rhyme, and there are few imitators. Although there are few practitioners and many opponents of prose poetry translation, its unique artistic ideas of translation, like a fresh spring, injecting new vitality into the English translation of Chinese ancient poetry in the modern context.

3.1. Xu Yuanchong

Mr. Xu Yuanchong is a master of Chinese translation circles with outstanding achievements and numerous works, devoted to translating classical Chinese cultural works. In addition, Hu Tianen pointed out that Professor Xu Yuanchong is also a well-known translation theorist and practitioner in China. He proposed the “Three Beauties” theory of poetry translation, believing that the translation of poetry should not only convey the meaning of the original poem, but also try to convey the beauty of sound and form^[5]. Lu Xun put forward the theory of “Three Beauties” on Chinese literary creation in the first article From Text to Articles in his book *Outline of the History of Chinese Literature*, that is, “the beauty of meaning to touch the heart, the first; the beauty of sound to please the ear, the second and the beauty of form to please the eye, the third.” When it comes to the theory of translation beauties, the renowned Chinese translator Xu Yuanchong transplanted Lu Xun’s “Three Beauties” theory and developed his own “Three Beauties” principle based on his own translation practice of poetry.

Xu Yuanchong wrote in “*Literature and Translation*”: “I applied Lu Xun’s ‘Three Beauties’

theory to translation, and it became the ‘Three Beauties’ theory of translating poetry.”^[6] In his view, “poetry translation should start with ‘beauty’, unify the artistic conception, sound, and form of the original poem, and try to present the unique charm of ancient poetry to delight readers.” The so-called beauty in sense refers to the experience of the content, emotion, and artistic conception of poetry that touches the heart; the beauty in sound refers to the experience of the rhythm, rhyme, and prosody of poetry that pleases the ear; the beauty in form refers to the experience of the neatness, parallelism, and coordination of the lines of poetry that enters the eye. This means that the appreciation of aesthetic beauty of sense, sound, and form requires readers to exert their subjective initiative, use sensitive hearts, clever ears, and bright eyes to appreciate culture, especially to appreciate the ancient poetry with long-lasting artistic conception, ups and downs, and neat parallelism, which places higher requirements on translators.

3.2. Weng Xianliang

Weng Xianliang’s outstanding achievement lies in poetry criticism and poetry, especially in translating English poetry into Chinese. The cornerstone of poetry lies in language, the sentiment lies in imagery, and the soul lies in style. From Hu Huaichen, Zhu Ziqing, and Guo Moruo to Mao Dun, Fu Lei, and Qian Zhongshu, all of them regard poetry translation as an art, believing that the essence of poetry translation lies in “spiritual resonance”, “artistic conception”, and “style”. Weng Xianliang once said that literary translation is like painting, and its value lies in “vividness of spirit” and “fullness of meaning”. So how to translate the style of the original work? Weng Xianliang believed that “the style of poetry is translatable”^[7]. The statement directs the core of poetry translation to “imagery”, which is the bridge connecting the language and artistic conception of poetry, and is also the “method” for appreciating Chinese classical poetry. In addition, Weng Xianliang’s theoretical pursuit of “sacrificing form for the spirit” is to understand the essence of poetry translation. In the 20th century, the entire Chinese translation studies were shrouded in the pursuit of the “faithfulness, expressiveness, and elegance” theory. This viewpoint is not only a deepening of the “likeness to the original” and “recreation of the artistic conception” theories, but also a methodological innovation for translating ancient Chinese poetry into English. It has also resonated with the pursuit of poetry translation by Pound, Newman, and Arnold in the overall effect of translation between Chinese and Western cultures.

In “*The Rhythm of Poetry*”, Wen Yiduo depicted Chinese poetry as possessing “the beauty of music, the beauty of painting, and the beauty of architecture”^[8]. Xu Baiqing compared translation to photography, while Chen Xijing used sculpture and painting to describe translation. Weng Xianliang himself also likened translation to painting. The understanding of the essence of poetry translation determines the emphasis in the process of spreading Chinese culture abroad, that is, “what to say”. Weng Xianliang said, “The purpose of translation is to introduce the original work to readers, to make them understand rather than not understand.” The seemingly plain language not only reveals the true meaning of translation, but also points out the responsibility and method of translation in the current context of spreading Chinese culture globally. In the context of telling good Chinese stories and promoting the understanding of Chinese culture, it is crucial to convey the essence of Chinese culture in a form that is easily accepted and appreciated by Western readers in order to establish China’s discourse power. Although the “dispersion” of Weng Xianliang’s “prose” translated poems is scattered in the surface structure of language, it “gathers” in the transmission of images and the construction of artistic conception, “gathers” in the essence of traditional Chinese literary theory, poetry theory, painting theory and writing theory, and “gathers” in the core of Chinese culture and world expression.

4. A Contrastive Analysis of the English Versions of Spring Morning

Akobson proposed that there are many different intra-lingual translations of this poem^[9]. Because Gan Xia, Wen Jun believed that translation is a cross-cultural and cross-lingual communication activity, which cannot be achieved without the translator who plays a decisive role^[10]. In addition, Yao Qiaomei pointed out that due to the subjectivity of each translator reflected in the translation activity, after discussion and debate with the original work, a compromise is finally reached, which results in the creation of a new text^[11]. The following are the two translation versions by Xu Yuanchong and Weng Xianliang.

Xu Yuanchong's translation: "This morn of spring in bed I'm lying, Not wake up till I hear birds crying. After on night of wind and showers, how many are the fallen flowers!" As can be seen, when interpreting poems in English, Xu pays much attention to rhythm, especially at the end of each sentence. The first two sentences end with "lying" and "crying", and the last two sentences end with "showers" and "flowers". The pronunciation is very consistent, and both of them achieve consonance. And from the first sentence onward, the content unfolds like a stream of clouds and water, which can read in one breath without pause. Of course, if you read it carefully, you can distinguish the rhythm in the middle, such as "This spring morning/ in bed/ I'm lying", with the cadence of the language. Therefore, the translation of poetry is not only an accurate translation of the content expressed in the original text, but also an expression of the unspeakable beauty in terms of metre and rhyme.

Weng Xianliang's translation: "Late! This morning as I awake I know. All around me the birds are crying, crying. The storm last night, I sensed its fury. How many, I wonder, are fallen, poor dear flowers." It can be seen that the sigh expressed in Weng's translation is the strongest. At the beginning of the poem, Weng used the word "Late!" to establish the emotional tone of the whole text. In addition, the two translators also differ in their treatment of the "crow" in the nod. The original meaning of "crow" is "crying", which also means "mourning" in ancient poems, adding a touch of sadness, such as "the moon is falling and the sky is full of crows and frost", and "the poplar flowers are falling and the children are crying". Therefore, the translation of Weng and Xu chose "crying" which is more close to the original text and conveys the emotion of the original work.

The rhythm of this poem is two-one-two, full of cadence and musical beauty. The sense of rhythm in English is generally reflected by the light and heavy pronunciation. Among the two translations, Xu pays the most attention to rhythm. Taking the first sentence as an example, the translation of "This morn of spring in bed I'm lying" basically follows the pattern of rising and falling in cadence, with alternating light and heavy pronunciation, giving people a sense of iambic. Xu Guoping noted that translation is difficult, and poetry translation is even more difficult. This is because poetry not only has the elements of general literary styles but also possesses characteristics such as artistic conception and phonetic features^[12]. Chinese ancient poetry emphasizes the neat antithesis and diverse rhymes. Because of the characteristics of Chinese characters, it is easier and more visually neat to keep the width consistent. English words, on the other hand, vary in length, making it harder to keep them the same. By comparing the two translations, it is not difficult to find that among the two translators, Xu pays the most attention to the beauty of shape, with eight syllables in each line. However, Weng emphasizes artistic conception, conveying the poet's expression, as if he were in the scene.

5. Conclusion

Poetry emphasizes the beauty of appearance, sound and meaning. Translators should not be satisfied with merely conveying the meaning of the original text, but should strive to reproduce the

beauty of the original text. As the saying goes, it is difficult to translate poetry, but even more difficult to translate Chinese poetry. Professor Bian Zhilin, a famous Chinese scholar and translator, once pointed out: “When translated into English, Chinese poetry should not only appear to be Chinese poetry, but also produce the same and similar effects in English as in China, so that it can be readable and recognizable in English. Accordingly, it’s extremely difficult to achieve this effect. When translating poetry, we should proceed step by step, but we can also make some corresponding adjustments that are as regular as the original poetry.” Therefore, how to perfectly translate the style and characteristics of ancient poetry and maintain the charm of the original poetry is what translators need to learn in the future.

References

- [1] Chen Jie. *Cognition on the Aesthetic Dimension of Fuzziness in English Translation of Chinese Classical Poetry--A Case Study of Poetry Translation of A Dream of Red Mansions*. *Journal of Xi'an International Studies University*, 2017 (3): 104-107.
- [2] Zhai Zihui. *The Art of Beautifying Poetry Translation--Comparison of Two Translations of Chun Xiao*. *Journal of Qinzhou University*, 2008, (5): 111-113.
- [3] Ni Chao. *Interpreting Metaphors Used in Meng Haoran's Chun Xiao*. *Journal of Guangzhou Radio and Television University*, 2012 (4): 37-40.
- [4] Tan Xiaochun, Huang Guowen. *Functional Linguistics Interpretation of Natural Poetry Translation--A Case Study of Meng Haoran's Chun Xiao*. *Foreign Language Education*, 2019, 40 (05): 72-78.
- [5] Hu Tianen. *Aesthetic Representation in Poetry Translation from the English Translation of Jiang Xue*. *Journal of Henan University of Technology (Social Science Edition)*, 2007, (03): 70-71+74.
- [6] Xu Yuanchong. *Literature and Translation*. Beijing: Peking University Press, 2003.
- [7] Weng Xianliang. *English Translation of Ancient Poetry*. Beijing: Beijing Publishing House, 1985.
- [8] Wen Yiduo. *Metrical Pattern of Poetry*. *Morning Newspaper • Poem Engraving*: No.7, 1926-05-13.
- [9] Jakobson R. *On Linguistic Aspects of Translation*. In R. Jakobson. *Selected Writings*. 2. *Word and Language*. The Hague: Mouton, 1971: 260-266.
- [10] Gan Xia, Wen Jun. *Chinese Translation of Chunxiao: Comments and Suggestions*. *Journal of Tianjin Foreign Studies University*, 2012, 19 (02): 31-35.
- [11] Yao Qiaomei. *On the English Version of Meng Haoran's Chun Xiao from the Perspective of Translator's Subjectivity*. *Journal of Nanchang University (Humanities and Social Sciences Edition)*, 2008 (04): 156-160.
- [12] Xu Guoping. *A Comparative Analysis of the English Translation of Chun Xiao*. *Chinese Translators Journal*, 2001 (02): 55-56.