A Study on Translation Strategies of Image in *The Book of Songs*

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Abstract. *The Book of Songs* is one of the earliest collection of poetry in China. It is also one of the earliest collection of poetry in the world which has great influence in the history of Chinese literature and in the history of world literature. There are a lot of cultural images in *The Book of Songs*, which adds vividness and artistry to poetry. The quality of image translation is closely related to the overall quality and artistic effect of *The Book of Songs*. The abstractness and complexity of cultural images bring great challenges to translators. And it is a subject worthy of further discussion. In the image translation of *The Book of Songs*, there are intralingual differences between ancient Chinese and modern Chinese, and the interlingual differences between Chinese culture and English culture. How to correctly understand the images in the original poem and make the target readers understand the image the original poem is intended to express is still a difficult problem. The translations produced by translators have a direct impact on whether Chinese culture can be actively spread.

This paper takes three English versions of *The Book of Songs* respectively by James Legge, Xu Yuanchong and Wang Rongpei as examples for a case study. By comparing the three translators’ translation strategies in dealing with images in *The Book of Song*, it points out that in translating the images, they applied various translation strategies, for the intralingual and interlingual differences which lead to the difficulty of understanding. It makes a comparative study that serves to understand the image translation strategies by different translators, and also provides new ideas for poetry image translation in the future.

1. Introduction

*The Book of Songs*, as one of the major source of Chinese literature, is one of the oldest collections of poetry in China, and is also a valuable legacy of world culture. The language of poetry is refined and introverted. Even a word and a sentence could contain infinite images and connotations. In the aesthetics of poetry, the Chinese admire method of expressing ambitions and emotions through describing concrete objects, emphasizing the concordant unity of the poetry and the spirit in it, the unity of the meaning and the image, and the unity of feeling and scenery. Therefore, people appreciate poetry, not only appreciate its language and text itself, but through the image to feel the charm in it. The great translation of poetry that can transmit the accurate feeling of the poet brings great difficulty to the poetry translator. At present, the research on the translation of *The Book of Songs* is mainly concentrated in five aspects: translation research, translator research, translating method research, comparative study of translation. This article explores the translation strategy of images in *The Book of Songs* that used by three translators, James Legge, Xu Yuanchong and Wang Rongpei to analyze how they manage to translate the images to express the emotion of the poetry.
2. Literature Review

2.1. The Definition of Poetry Image

Image is an important concept in ancient Chinese literature, and it is also an aesthetic category created by China, especially in poetry. Since the beginning of poetry, the image has played an important role in the form of the thought in poetry and later developed into the most important foundation of poetry. The image of poetry is composed of subjective meaning and objective image which are indispensable. “Meaning” refers to thoughts, emotions, ideas, consciousness, etc. “Image” refers to the concrete objects and events of nature and society. The image in poetry is the expression produced by the collision between the subjective sentiment of the poet and the objective things. It is the result of the blending of the objective scenery and the mutual reflection of the mind. This is a complicated conversion process. First, the poet has some kind of emotion about the objective scenery, then creates an image, incorporates his own unique feelings, and expresses it in poetry. The poet puts the subjective feelings on the objective things, pins the abstract feelings on the concrete objects, and makes them become the sensible and touching artistic image of the scene, thus producing unlimited artistic charm.

Yuan Xingpei mentioned \cite{18} the image is objective, and once the image brings the poet’s idea, it is given the subjective color of the poet. At this time it is subject to two aspects of processing: on the one hand, through the selection of the poet’s aesthetic experience, it should meet the poet’s aesthetic ideals and taste; on the other hand, through the selection of poet’s thoughts and feelings, it should infiltrate the poet’s personality and interest. The object image processed through these two aspects then becomes the image in the poem. the inner meaning in the image is the poet's aesthetic experience and individuality. Therefore, it can be said that the image is integrated into the subjective. The objective image of affection, or the subjective affection expressed by objective object.

2.2. Translation Standards for Poetry

Chinese poetry based on lyric tradition has become the main style of Chinese literature. When carrying out the image translation of the English translation of \textit{The Book of Songs}, the translation requirements, aesthetic feeling of form, aesthetic feeling of rhyme, and aesthetic feeling of inner meaning, should be carefully caught by the translator. The rhyme, the tonal patterns and the tone, these three factors constitute the beauty and meaning of the form of \textit{The Book of Songs} poetry, and English does not have this distinction. In the process of poetry translation, the translator should try to use accurate English words, considering the beauty of the scene and the beauty of form, and accurately express the profound meaning of it. Chinese translation of English must maintain its distinctive character. First of all, we must distinguish what is character. It is not the rhetoric, not the allusion, nor the form, but the image and the rhythm of strengthening its artistic effect \cite{7}.

3. Translation Strategies of Image in the Book of Songs

3.1. The Case Study of Image Translation Strategies

3.1.1. Image Retention

It is generally believed that there is no right to change or add or delete non-figurative images. It must be strictly reproduced \cite{17}. Because this can truly express the original text and embody the principle of “faithfulness.” If the translator has translated the non-figurative image, it will violate the original intention of the author. That is to say, descriptive images should be preserved. Here is the example:
桃夭 is a wedding poem, wishing the newly married bride a happy life, and comparing the pretty face of the bride to the peach flower. The poet repeatedly praised a peach tree of a proper age. From the clusters of flowers to the fruit, and then to the green leaves, it is the natural characteristic of peach trees. These descriptions metaphorize the life experience of the girl after marriage. When she got married, she has a peach blossom, and many children after marriage. The vivid image is metaphorical natural and appropriate. Here takes the three versions of translation:

Example 1: 桃之夭夭，灼灼其华
The peach tree is young and elegant;
Brilliant are its flowers.
This young lady is going to her future home,
And will order well her chamber and house. [1]

The peach tree beams so red,
How brilliant are its flowers!
The maiden’s getting wed,
Good for the nuptial bowers. [14]

The peach tree stands wayside,
With blossoms glowing pink.
I wish the pretty bride
Affluence in food and drink. [12]

It can be seen from the translations of the three of them that they choose the image retention strategy for the image of the peach tree, and literally translated the lush growth of the peach tree. The image of the peach tree also represents the bride’s beauty and good morality. Both the Chinese and the West have plants such as “Peach,” and the associations have similarities and differences. As a common fruit image, peach is red and white, so people can easily associate with a beautiful girl’s face. Both English and Chinese people use peach to refer to the young girl with fine skin. In English, the sentence “She is really a peach” is often used to describe a beautiful and attractive woman. Although English also uses peach to express the idiom of “beauty,” but does not use peaches to mean the meaning of “multiple sons and more blessings.” When the metaphor of “Peach” in English and Chinese does not have a completely equivalent cognition, the image retention method of retaining only the literal translation of the ontology image in the original language remains to be considered.
3.1.2. Image Revision

If the image of reservation is culturally misunderstood or incomprehensible, appropriate translation of the image is required. Translating is an interpretation of the original text. Try to achieve “smoothness” and “elegance” when translating. Here takes the three versions of translation for example:

Example 2: 鱒鱼赪尾，王室如毁

The bream in showing its tail all red;
The royal House is like a blazing fire. [1]

The bream has fire-red tail,
My lord has fire-red eye. [14]

Like breams in danger offshore,
The folk are living in plight. [12]

汝坟 is a sad poem with the theme that the wife persuades her husband to stay at the hometown from long army service. In ancient times, people thought that the red tail of the bream was caused by fatigue. The husband in the poem said helplessly that the country was in restless war, and the situation was as hot as the red tail of the bream.

It can be seen that Wang chooses the strategy of image revision. He didn’t translate the image of the “bream’s red tail”, but bream is “in danger offshore”. Similarly, Xu translated “王室” to “my lord”. And Wang’s version is “the folk.” It is more convenient for readers who have no knowledge of cultural background to understand the meaning of the source text.

3.1.3. Image Amplification

The use of the translation method is due to the existence of cultural communication barriers [3]. There are many important images in ancient poetry that are difficult for the target language readers to understand. At this time, it is necessary to add explanatory components or modifiers appropriately so that the reader can obtain hints and expand the imagination to understand. Here is the example:

Example 3: 焉得谖草？言树之背

How shall I get the plant of forgetfulness?
I would plant it on the north of my house. [1]

Where’s the herb to forget?
To plant it north I’d start.

Where can I find flowers to pick,
To plant behind the large estate?

“伯兮”is a lyric poem that expresses love, sickness and concern, describing wife’s deepest thoughts about the serving husband, and also reflects the pain that the war has brought to the people. “谖草”is a kind of grass. In China, there is a name for forgetting grass. It is said from the legend that forgetting grass can make people forget the troubles. Both Li and Xu used the strategy of amplification to express the cultural connotation of the forgetting grass, making it easier for the reader to understand the wife’s missing about her husband. But Wang chose to omit this image and translated it directly into flower.

3.1.4. Image Omission

The expression of some images may require a long text to explain, while the addition will destroy the rhythm and form beauty of poetry. Therefore, this kind of image is often omitted or expressed in other ways. Here is the example:

Example 4: 投我以木瓜，报之以琼琚。
投我以木桃，报之以琼瑶。
投我以木李，报之以琼玖。

The poem “木瓜”is in the form of a heavy chapter, repeating the same meaning that only slightly changed a few words: “琼琚，琼瑶，琼玖” are all jade with different size and shape; “木瓜，木桃，木李” also belong to quince, the difference is very small. And they form a rhyme beauty of ups and downs, which are good for singing. The version of Legge is “papaya, peach, plum;” “keu-gem, yaou-gem, kew-stone.” Xu: “quince, peach, plum;” “green jade, white jade, jasper fair.” Wang: “quince, peach, plum;” “gem, jade, jewel.” All three translators used the strategy of image omission that the purpose is to maintain the rhythm and form beauty of poetry.

3.2. Comparative Analysis of Three Versions

Here is a comparative analysis of the translations of three translators, James Legge, Xu Yuanchong and Wang Rongpei. Take the first paragraph of “关雎”as an example:

Example 5: 关关雎鸠，在河之洲。窈窕淑女，君子好逑。
Kwan-kwan go the ospreys,
On the islet in the river.
The modest, retiring, virtuous, young lady:
For our prince a good mate she.
By riverside are cooing
A pair of turtledoves.

A good young man is wooing,
A fair maiden he loves. [14]

The waterfowl would coo
Upon an islet in the brook.

A lad would like to woo
A lass with nice and pretty look. [12]

“雎鸠” is a kind of “waterfowl, often inhabiting by rivers and lakes, living like a pair of love bird, so the ancients regarded it as a symbol of love between men and women” [10]

Legge used the transliteration method to call “雎鸠” Kwan-kwan, and then uses the method of literal translation to translate “雎鸠” which is the symbol of love into ospreys. Xu used the method of revision to translate “雎鸠” into “a pair of turtledove.” Wang also used a literal translation method to translate “雎鸠” into waterfowl.

The image of “雎鸠,” Legge and Wang choose the method of literal translation, while Xu chooses the method of revision. “雎鸠” is a bird that symbolizes love. The osprey is a fierce big bird. Waterfowl is the general name for the bird. And the meaning of turtledove explained in the Longman Online Dictionary is: a type of bird that makes a pleasant soft sound and is sometimes used to represent love. We can see that the turtledove can show this love image more clearly.

From this translation, their styles are obviously different that the reasons are mainly related to the purpose of their translation. Legge as a missionary and a translator who respects Eastern culture believes that only under the premise of understanding the Chinese scriptures and examining the social and political life of China, can his translation let Western readers better understand Chinese culture and can also better spread their religious beliefs in China. He advocated the faithful expression of the meaning of the original text, and the principle of no adding and no cutting. His translation strictly abides by the sentence structure and order of the original poem, and literally translates every word of the original poem with no change in the word order. But there is no rhythm, no rhymes in his translation and the rhythm is not strong. Therefore, his translation basically belongs to prose style without rhyme.

As Chinese translators, Xu and Wang paid more attention to the cultural connotation of Chinese poetry to foreign readers. Xu advocates that the translation of poetry should obey three beauty: “beauty of meaning, beauty of rhyme, and beauty of form” [15]. Beauty of meaning refers to the source language and the target language to achieve reciprocity at the level of the text and the target language must reproduce the implicit meaning of the source language at the level of imagery and
artistic conception. Beauty of rhyme means that the translation has a pleasing rhythm like the original poem, like alliteration or end rhymes. Beauty of form means that the translation maintains the original poetry as much as possible, giving the reader a visual sense of pleasure. He believes that when translating The Book of Songs, it is necessary not only to maintain the content and ideas of The Book of Songs, but also keep the original form, rhyme and meaning, keeping the original flavor of all aspects, making an aesthetic masterpiece. Wang’s opinion is much similar with that of Xu. He thought that the translation of The Book of Songs should pursue both the beauty of form and the beauty of meaning. He believes that the translated poem should give the vivid impression of the original poem, and keep the original poetry as much as possible.

Basing on the different translation purposes and identifications, the poetry translation becomes the art of recreation and gives translation researchers new research directions.

4. Conclusion

From the perspective of poetry aesthetics, the beauty of poetry is highly concerned with the beauty of image. Because if poetry has no image, it has no artistic conception and without the artistic conception, it loses its soul. Therefore, the translator should fully understand and care for the image, and must rely on the meticulous management of the image. In the process of translating the image in The Book of Songs, the three translators choose different translation strategies under different circumstances. The common point is that they use retention, translation and translation strategies, but there are still deficiencies in the translation. In the face of poetry translation, the translator should have sufficient cross-cultural awareness, fully understand the cultural attributes of the image, and the fact that different cultures have different image traditions. In general, The most fundamental principle of image translation is to proceed from the overall artistic conception of poetry, and to be good at using various translation strategies to make the translation retreat in the whole image system of the original poem without destroying the overall artistic conception of the original poem. Only translating poetry as a living organic art is probably the road to the translation of poetry image. Only in this way can the translation of poetry eventually end up in the realm and assume the responsibility of cultural exchange.

References


