

A Study on Xu Yuanchong's English Version of *Song ci* from the Perspective of Translation Process Model

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ABSTRACT

The study has examined how Xu Yuanchong reproduces “Three Beauties” in his English version of *Song ci* from the perspective of Nida’s translation process model. Based on the analyses of images, repeated words and antithesis, the study has found that Xu Yuanchong has made numerous adjustments in his translation to restore the beauty of *Song ci*. It is hoped that the study can shed some light on the translation of classical Chinese poetry and serve the purpose of telling China’s stories well.

1. Introduction

In the era of globalization, China, with its increasingly prominent role on the international stage, attaches great importance to cultural dissemination and is devoted to telling China’s stories well.

In the long river of history in China, there has been precious cultural heritage worth people’s respect and praise. Among them, *Song ci* remains one of the brightest pearls, enlightening generations after generations. As the peak of literature in Song dynasty, *Song ci* is an epitome of that era. Many excellent poets hide their stories, feelings and attitudes behind their works. And for those who are eager to explore the old stories, *Song ci* will be the key. As a grand painting about Song dynasty unfolds before their eyes, the charm of *Song ci* will lead readers back to Song

dynasty to relive those old days so that they can be more familiar with China’s history and be inspired by how brilliant China’s culture is. That is why the spread of *Song ci* becomes an important task for China. Among all the scholars and translators who have worked hard to fulfill the task, Xu Yuanchong can be considered as one of the brightest stars.

Xu Yuanchong, an authority in the field of translation, is renowned for his translation of classical works and his principle of “Three Beauties” (beauty in sense, sound and form) in translation. Research of Xu Yuanchong’s translation principles through his own translated works is of great significance, shedding light on the spread of China’s excellent culture. Eugene A. Nida, a pioneering linguist and translation theorist, has made great achievements to translation studies. His 4-step translation process model

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provides a glimpse of how the translator handles the translation. Therefore, the study aims to explore how Xu Yuanchong applies the principle of “Three Beauties” to his English version of *Song ci* from the perspective of Eugene A. Nida’s translation process model.

2. Eugene A. Nida’s translation process model

Eugene A. Nida, a pioneer in the field of translation studies, has developed a systematic approach to translation known as the translation process model. The model includes four stages, analysis, transfer, restructuring and testing. The first stage, analysis, involves a thorough examination of the source text’s grammatical relationships and semantic structure to determine its underlying meaning^[1]. The second stage, transfer, entails converting the analyzed meaning from the source language (SL) into the conceptual framework of the target language (TL)^[2]. In the third stage, restructuring, the translator reorganizes the transferred meaning into a natural and coherent form in the TL, ensuring readability and cultural appropriateness^[1]. Finally, the testing phase evaluates the translation’s effectiveness, often through feedback from target readers, to verify its accuracy and communicative impact^[2].

Nida’s four-step translation process model, rooted in his theory of dynamic equivalence, is usually regarded as a prescriptive framework for achieving equivalence. However, the model, if conceptualized as a descriptive framework, can also function as a valuable tool for deconstructing translators’ decision-making process when doing a translation. Therefore, by means of this tool, the study can provide a thorough examination of how Xu Yuanchong reproduces “Three Beauties” in his English version of *Song ci*.

3. Reproduction of “Three Beauties” in Xu Yuanchong’s English version of *Song ci* from the Perspective of Translation Process Model

As is introduced before, Nida’s translation process model includes 4 stages, analysis, transfer, restructuring and testing. Since the last stage, testing, focuses on target readers’ response, which is beyond the scope of the study, the section will remove testing from the discussion below. And the other three stages will function as a descriptive framework to examine Xu’s English version of *Song ci*. The three-stage system has been briefly concluded by Jeremy Munday -- “the surface structure of the ST is analyzed into the basic elements of the deep structure; these are ‘transferred’ in the translation process and then restructured semantically and stylistically into the surface

structure of the TT.”^[3] And this is the basis for our discussion below.

3.1 Reproduction of Beauty in Sense based on Translation Process Model

Beauty in sense focuses on the artistic conception. And, according to Weng Yuling, the artistic conception in poetry relies on images.^[4] Therefore, this section will mainly center around the handling of images.

Images are often employed in classical Chinese poetry and *Song ci* is no exception. Over the past thousands of years, various images have spouted from our brilliant Chinese culture. For instance, moon is a common image that represents homesickness and nostalgia, as is shown in “但愿人长久，千里共婵娟” by Su Shi^[5]. Besides, there are many other common images like mume blossom, spring and river in classical Chinese poetry. Therefore, the handling of images becomes a frequent task for Prof. Xu when doing the translation, and on the other hand, the handling of images will have a great impact on the reproduction of beauty in sense in the translated version.

As follows are analyses of how Prof. Xu reproduces beauty in sense in his English version of *Song ci* in terms of images.

Example 1:

驿外断桥边，
寂寞开无主。
已是黄昏独自愁，
更着风和雨。

无意苦争春，
一任群芳妒。
零落成泥碾作尘，
只有香如故。^[5]

Beside the broken bridge and outside the post hall
A flower is blooming forlorn.
Saddened by her solitude at nightfall,
By wind and rain she’s further torn.

Let other flowers their envy pour!
To spring she lays no claim.
Fallen in mud and ground to dust, she seems no more,
But her fragrance is still the same.^[5]

In the stage of analysis, these images adopted in the original work should be deeply explored. Prunus mume is the primary image in this poem. In Chinese culture, the three durable plants of winter, prunus mume together with

pine and bamboo, are highly praised as “three cold-weather friends” which symbolize purity and nobility. The translator who is familiar with the background knowledge of prunus mume will easily figure out the poet’s intended meaning. It is the lofty character of prunus mume that is highly praised here. Naturally, the connection can be identified between the image of mume blossom and the poet, a patriotic poet who stuck to his position in a turbulent era. Besides mume blossom, there are also other common images such as “断桥”(broken bridge), “黄昏”(nightfall), “风”(wind) and “雨”(rain). All of these help create a gloomy atmosphere of sadness to pave the way for the praise of the nobility of mume blossom.

According to Nida & Taber, in the stage of transfer, semantic adjustment and structural adjustment should be taken into consideration.^[2] Since this part mainly focuses on images which are single words or phrases, structural adjustment won’t be included here. As for semantic adjustment, most images included in this poem don’t need it except the one, “驿站”. According to the Chinese notes, “驿站” is a place where letters or documents are delivered or where officials take a rest, get the supplies or change a tired horse for another one on a journey.^[5] There is no counterpart in the target language, so semantic meaning should be adjusted. And here, Prof. Xu has chosen “post hall” for “驿站”.

In the stage of restructuring, the style of original works should be taken into consideration. Therefore, choosing the most appropriate vocabulary in target language for these images becomes very important in this stage. Generally speaking, vocabulary often used in ancient literary works of the target language will be more appropriate for these images in *Song ci*. That is why Prof. Xu has chosen “nightfall” (old-fashioned according to Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English) instead of the frequently-used word “dusk” for the image “黄昏”.

3.2 Reproduction of Beauty in Sound based on Translation Process Model

It is well-known that *Song ci* can be sung to the music for entertainment, and beauty in sound is one typical feature of *Song ci*. According to the studies of modern cognitive linguistics and experimental psychology, human beings’ audiovisual perception is at the forefront of their ability of linguistic perception, and 87% of linguistic meaning is received and processed first through audiovisual perception.^[6] Therefore, beauty in sound plays a crucial role in the appreciation of *Song ci*, and reproducing beauty in sound should be a necessary task for translators.

Repeated words often appear in *Song ci* as a common stylistic device to achieve beauty in sound. And this part

will focus on how Prof. Xu reproduces beauty in sound in terms of repeated words in his English version of *Song ci*.

Example 2:

寻寻觅觅，
冷冷清清，
凄凄惨惨戚戚。^[5]

I look for what I miss;
I know not what it is.
I feel so sad, so drear,
So lonely, without cheer.^[5]

In the stage of analysis, the meaning and function of repeated words should be identified. The poet heaved a great sigh in the poem about her miserable life -- she lost her beloved husband and lived alone in a turbulent era. Repeated words help create a gloomy atmosphere for all the depressed feelings of the poet. And the poem, with these repeated words, can easily find emotional resonance in readers. With the key to the poet’s inner world, readers can fully understand her great sorrow and depression. Therefore, reproducing the great power of repeated words in the poem is a crucial task for the translator.

In the stage of transfer, both structural adjustment and semantic adjustment have been made. Since repeated words are not common in English for the sake of grammatical rules, Xu has replaced them with three complete sentences. As for the semantic adjustment, Xu has changed the subject of the second short sentence. The implied subject in the original poem is the indifferent and lonely world the poet was living while in Xu’s translation the subject is “I”, the poet herself. The reason why Xu has made the adjustment here is to restore the beauty of the poem by means of parallelism, a common stylistic device in literary works.

In the stage of restructuring, the original style of *Song ci* should be maintained. As rhyme is a striking feature of *Song ci*, techniques like parallelism, alliteration and end rhyme have been employed to restore the original style. The use of these techniques has not only depicted accurately the poet’s inner world in a natural way for the sake of target readers, but also reproduced the beauty in sound of the original work.

3.3 Reproduction of Beauty in Form based on Translation Process Model

According to Xu, beauty in form ranks the third after beauty in sense and beauty in sound in terms of the priority given in translating a poem.^[7] However, the importance

of beauty in form can never be denied. It can interact with beauty in sense or beauty in sound to help reinforce each other, and then magnify the beauty of the whole poem.

Antithesis is often employed in *Song ci* as an important technique to achieve beauty in form. This part will focus on how Prof. Xu reproduces beauty in form in terms of antithesis in translation.

Example 3:

此情无计可消除，
才下眉头，
却上心头。^[5]

O how can such lovesickness be driven away?
From eyebrows kept apart,
Again it gnaws my heart.^[5]

In the stage of analysis, the antithesis in “才下眉头，却上心头” should be interpreted. The antithesis has vividly depicted a picture in which once the poet’s frown of lovesickness is kept apart, her heart is occupied with this sorrowful feeling immediately. In this way, the poet’s lovesickness has been highlighted thanks to the clever use of antithesis in the original work.

In the stage of transfer, structural adjustment and semantic adjustment have been made here. “才下眉头” and “却上心头” are elliptical sentences without subjects. According to grammatical rules of English, the subjects have to be restored, and that is why structural adjustment must be made here. Therefore, Xu has turned the two elliptical sentences into one complete sentence with the past participle “kept” as the adverbial in his translation. , Also, semantic adjustment has been made due to the difference in word classes between Chinese and English. “上” and “下” can function as verbs in classical Chinese works while their English counterparts, “up” and “down”, can not do. In this way, Xu has shifted his focus from beauty in form to beauty in sound and instead picked out the verb, “gnaws”, with similar vowel pronunciation [ɔ:] to [aʊ] in “eyebrows”, to achieve beauty in sound in his translation.

In the stage of restructuring, the word order has been adjusted for the sake of rhyme. “Kept apart from eyebrows” is restructured as “From eyebrows kept apart” in Xu’s translation, together with “Again it gnaws my heart”, to achieve end rhyme. Although differences between the source language and the target language are a big obstacle for the translator to fully reproduce the beauty of antithesis, Xu has successfully restored the beauty of the poem by means of rhymes.

4. Conclusion

The study, taking Nida’s translation process model as a descriptive tool for the translator’s decision-making process, has successfully examined how Xu Yuanchong reproduces “Three Beauties” in his English version of *Song ci*. Based on the analyses of images, repeated words and antithesis, the study has found that Xu Yuanchong has made numerous adjustments in his translation to restore the beauty of *Song ci*. It is hoped that the study can shed some light on the translation of classical Chinese poetry and serve the purpose of telling China’s stories well.

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