

A Study On the Translation of Allusions in Ancient Chinese Poetry

-- Taking Liu Yuxi's 'A Reply to Bai Juyi's Poem at Our First Meeting in Yangzhou' As an Example

Wanyu Ni*

College of Foreign Languages, Shanghai University of Engineering Science, Shanghai, China

*corresponding author

Abstract: The translation of allusion is based on the translation of text to explore its connotation. It is not only the transformation of literal meaning but also an effective communication of cultural information. This paper takes Xu Yuanchong and He Zhongjian's translation of Liu Yuxi's 'A Reply to Bai Juyi's Poem at Our First Meeting in Yangzhou' as an example to study their different understanding of the allusions in the same poem and their approaches to the translation of allusions in ancient Chinese poems.

Keywords: A Reply to Bai Juyi's Poem at Our First Meeting in Yangzhou', Xu Yuanchong, He Zhongjian, English Translation, Translation Strategy.

1. Introduction

Allusion is an important disseminator of the heritage of Chinese culture. It takes us into Chinese history of various eras to improve the understanding of the social situation at that time. The cultural connotation and essence of poetry are often condensed and sublimated with allusions, thus, increasing the difficulty of translation. In consequence, the translation should not only explain the meaning of the allusion clearly but also maintain the unique expression form of the poem throughout the whole text, so that readers can understand the whole poem and achieve the effect of cultural transmission.

2. Translation Strategies

Poetry often quotes allusions to enhance the theme of artistic beauty. Take “酬乐天扬州初逢席上见赠” as an example, this poem is written by Liu Yuxi, a Tang poet. During the Shunzong period, Liu Yuxi was seriously persecuted by others because of he participated in Wang Shuwen's reform. Under the joint strike of eunuchs and vassal states, Shunzong was used by Emperor Xianzong, Wang Shuwen was killed, and Liu Yuxi and others were demoted. This poem is from the Baoli second year of Tang Jingzong. At that time, Liu Yuxi resigned and returned to Luoyang to meet Bai Juyi in Yangzhou. Bai Juyi wrote a poem for Liu Yuxi, and Liu Yuxi in order to return, wrote “酬乐天扬州初逢席上见赠” [1]. There are two allusions in the poem “怀旧空吟闻笛赋，到乡翻似烂柯人”，which are all folk legends. Due to the great differences between Chinese and English in terms of text, culture, and logic, as well as the influence of the times and the creative background of poetry itself, it is necessary to adopt various methods to translate it. The translation of the chin couplet is as follows :

Xu Yuanzhong: To mourn for my departed friends I come too late; In my native land I look like human debris [2].

He Zhongjian: Feeling nostalgic, poems I vainly wrote on hearing the flute; Completely worn out, home I barely

managed to arrive [3].

The author now came back to find many old friends have died, he can only use the flute “fu” to express his sorrow. This time back, it is a world away, only feel that this is not the past. Liu yuxi borrowed these two allusions to miss the dead Wang shuwen, Liu zongyuan and others, to express their feelings of 23 years of derogation, to express the vicissitudes of life, all non-personnel, old age returning home as if the mood of the world.

“怀旧空吟闻笛赋” in the “Wendi Fu” as an allusion. It refers to the Western Jin Xiangxiu's ‘Sijiu Fu’. In the late years of Cao Wei in the Three Kingdoms, Ji Kang and Lu An, Xiang Xiu's friends, were finally killed because they were dissatisfied with Sima's usurpation of power. Later, when Xiang Xiu passed Ji Kang and Lu An's former residence, he heard the neighbor playing the flute, which in turn caused the memory of the old man, so he wrote down the “Sijiu Fu”. From the translation, we can see that Xu Yuanchong focuses on the original poem “Wendi” feelings. Therefore, he tends to use alienation to pass the ancient Chinese culture to the reader, omitting the image of “Wen di”. “To mourn for my departed friends” interprets the author's emotion to express the profound meaning of the allusion. He used naturalization, with “poems” and “the flute”, to restore the scenes of “compose Fu” and “wen di si gu”. In addition, after the whole translation, he annotated “flute”, adding that “flute-The poet had written many good poems about his nostalgic feeling upon hearing Tartar flutes while he served in hills passes in the frontiers.” Let readers feel the meaning of allusions.

The word “lan ke ren” in “到乡翻似烂柯人” is the second allusion of the whole poem. “Ke” means the wooden handle of the axe, “lan ke” means the rotten handle of the axe. According to “Shu Yi Ji”, there was a woodcutter named Wang Zhi in the Southern Jin Dynasty, who lived chopping firewood all day. One day he went up to the mountain and saw two boys playing chess. He stopped to watch them play chess. The chess game lasted for a long time, until the end of the chess game, when the boy asked why Wang Zhi did not leave, he suddenly realized that the axe in his hand had already

decayed. Returning to the village, he realized that it had been a hundred years, and the same generation had died. The “lan ke ren” in the original poem refers to the people who have left home for a long time and have just returned to their hometown, and also refers to the people who have experienced the changes of the world. Xu Yuanchong translates it into “human debris”. Debris means one left behind by explosion or impact, expressing the state of mind that things are human and melancholy. He Zhongjian translated the whole sentence into “it was great difficult to return to his hometown”, and he felt exhausted. The two translators adopted the strategy of domestication in translating the second allusion. Readers can understand and sympathize with the author's long exile experience, feeling the poet's long-suppressed anger, making Chinese culture closer to the target culture readers.

3. Rhythm Fluency

Rhythm is an important factor to reflect the vitality of poetry, which means a superb poem always has a very appropriate rhythm. Professor He Zhongjian, who has been studying Chinese classical poetry for many years, advocates that poetry translation should maintain its original style of ‘using a rhyme from the beginning to the end. The theory of “Three Beauties” (beauty of sound, beauty of form, and beauty of conception) in the translation of poetry put forward by Xu Yuanchong serves as the guiding principle in doing translation of poetry. Regardless of the linguistic differences between Chinese and English, the language itself carries rich historical and cultural characteristics, and it is not easy to thoroughly present the ‘beauty of sound’. Guo Moruo mentioned in *On Rhythm* that ‘the process of emotion has its wave-like form, or first suppression and then uplift, or first uplift and then suppression, or between suppression and uplift, which is found to become the rhythm of poetry [4].’ The rhythm he mentioned is to express the internal rhythm of poetry by using other methods such as word carving and sentence deformation in addition to the use of external antithesis, tonal coordination and rhyme. English and Chinese belong to two completely different language systems. When translating Chinese poetry into English with forcefully external rhythm, it is an extreme expression of ‘faithfulness, expressiveness and elegance, which leads to incoherence. For poetry, the most indispensable thing is its internal rhythm, while the external rhythm is a coat that can polish the article.

The expressions of the two translations are both very sensible, and the sentence patterns are consistent. The translation of the same sentence separated by commas also maintains a relatively small difference in the number of words, which is loyal to the linguistic symmetry of the original sentence and very neat. The first sentence puts the infinitive as the purpose adverbial, expressing the strong nostalgia for the deceased concisely and clearly. The second part divides the whole sentence of the original text into short sentences. The use of object prepositions plays an emphasis role, showing the author's deep nostalgia. Since there is no rhyme in the original allusion sentence, the translation also follows the tone of the original text, does not change the rhythm because of the rigid pursuit of ‘beauty of sound’ and ‘beauty of form’, and does not abandon the main melody of the original poem.

4. Culture Background

Translation and culture are inextricably linked. The

translation of poetry and allusions is also the translation of a country's history and culture. As one of the important media of cultural exchange, translation enables countries to have more contacts and new understanding in more fields. The two translators' translation styles have their characteristics, and we can also trace their different ideas about translation from the text. Known as “China's first translator”, Xu Yuanchong witnessed the great changes in China's history for nearly a century. He is so familiar with this history that he wants to translate for the world. In his more than 80 years of translation career, he has been adhering to the “beauty of form, beauty of meaning, beauty of sound” translation ideas. Although He Zhongjian does not regard himself as a translator, he is engaged in the translation of Tang poetry, Song Ci, completely out of his hobby. In addition, his only wish is to teach our youth, let them understand the beauty of poetry, and make them understand traditional Chinese culture. The text also reflects the different approaches of the two translators to the cultural background of the allusions. The allusion of “Ode to the flute” in the original poem is a metaphor for the poet's nostalgia for the old man. He Zhongjian translated to “hear the flute and then write the poetry”, in order to express the feelings of mourning. Xu Yuanchong's translation directly expresses the author's nostalgia. From his translation, it can be seen that XU Yuanchong paraphrased allusions from a macroscopic perspective and did not mention nouns in the English translation. We can find that the translation of He can reflect the literal meaning of allusions, and reveal the cultural connotation contained in allusions. The “flute” in the translated version has a strong effect in transmitting ancient Chinese culture. It can be seen that Mr. He Zhongjian wanted to directly let the readers feel the cultural story carried by the word by introducing the object in the allusion. The translation of Xu omitted the historical and cultural connotations contained in the allusion. Similarly, Mr. Xu cleverly translates the allusion “lan ke ren” as “human debris”. It still does not mention the specific people and things in the allusions, such as “Wang Zhi” and “rotten ax”, but it flexibly conveys the meaning of the allusions, which is easy to understand across cultures. If the translator chooses literal translation without understanding the cultural background of the allusion, it will be difficult for foreign readers to feel the deep meaning of the poem.

5. Conclusions

In the context of globalization, it is a general trend to export culture through excellent translated works. When translating poetry, especially allusions, translators should try their best to express the rhythm of the original work, pay attention to the cultural transmission of the translation, and master the special culture-loaded words in the allusions. Do not neglect the essence of “letter, reach and elegance” because of the pursuit of external neat format. Allusions contain profound cultural deposits, which will inevitably bring more difficulties to translation work. Based on fully understanding the historical and cultural background of China, the translator should consider the cultural habits of the target language, choose appropriate translation strategies, and refine every word so that readers can truly understand the original work. Xu Yuanchong's translation career has lasted for more than 80 years. It can be seen that a large amount of accumulation and experience are indispensable for the translation of allusions. In short, only by combining poetic allusions with culture and reducing the possible cultural loss in the translation process

can the essence of traditional Chinese culture be truly conveyed.

References

- [1] Liang, S, Z: Translation of Selected Poems by Liu Yuxi (Bashu Press, 1990).
- [2] Xu, Y, C: Three Hundred Poems of the Tang Dynasty(Higher Education Press, 2000).
- [3] He, Z, J: Selected poems of Tang Dynasty translated from English (The Commercial Press (Hong Kong) Limited, 2015).
- [4] Dong, J. The Internal rhythm of ancient Chinese poems and the standard of English translation. *Journal of Shanghai University (Social Sciences)*, vol.13 (2006), 146-151.