

A Comparative Study on the Tang Poetry Translation in the Perspective of 'Harmony-Guided Three-Level Poetry Translation Criteria'—A Case Study of Li Bai's *Invitation to Wine*

Li Wenxuan¹, Wang Feng^{2#}

^{1,2}School of Foreign Studies, Yangtze University, Hubei, 434023 PRC China.

#corresponding author

Type of Work: Peer-Reviewed

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.21013/jems.v16.n3.p1>

How to cite this paper:

Li. W.X., Wang, F. (2020). A Comparative Study on the Tang Poetry Translation in the Perspective of 'Harmony-Guided Three-Level Poetry Translation Criteria'—A Case Study of Li Bai's *Invitation to Wine*. *IRA International Journal of Education and Multidisciplinary Studies* (ISSN 2455-2526), 16(3), 128-136. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.21013/jems.v16.n3.p1>

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¹Li Wenxuan is a postgraduate of QX191 in the School of Foreign Studies, Yangtze University.

²Wang Feng (corresponding author) is an Associate Professor in the School of Foreign Studies, Yangtze University. His research interests include translation studies, intercultural communication, and interpreting studies.

ABSTRACT

There are many English versions of poems on the market with different styles, but the quality of the translated poems is quite different. This paper mainly makes a comparative analysis of English translations of Li Bai's "Invitation to Wine" by using Dr Wang Feng's "Harmony-Guided Three-Level Poetry Translation Criteria" and concludes that when translating poems into English, we should not only achieve harmony at the macro level, and the similar style and artistic conception at the meso-level, but pay attention to the representation of various beauties at the micro-level. Through the analysis, the authors hope to verify the guiding role of "Harmony-Guided Three-Level Poetry Translation Criteria" in poetry translation and promote the English translation of Chinese poetry.

Keywords: Tang poetry translation; Harmony-Guided Three-Level Poetry Translation Criteria; 'Invitation to Wine'; Li Bai.

I. Introduction

The poems in the Tang Dynasty with brilliant artistic achievements are gems in the treasure house of world literature. The poems of Li Bai, Du Fu and other great poets have been spread all over the world and loved by people of all nationalities, especially in the English world. As far as we know, S. Jenys, a British Sinologist and poet, made great efforts to translate Tang poetry into English. His last works were compiled into *Selections from the 300 Poems of the Tang Dynasty* and *A Further Selections from the 300 Poems of the Tang Dynasty*. The English translation of Tang poetry not only introduces the art of Tang poetry to the English world and makes the Western readers enjoy the aesthetic feeling, but also has a great impact on the creation of new poems in the English world. With China's reform and opening up, more scholars, in face of the increasing cultural exchanges between the East and the West, are pushing the translation activities of Tang poetry in China to a new period of prosperity. As we all know, it is very difficult to translate the literature and poetry of different nationalities from language forms to thoughts and feelings. Therefore, in the new era, an effective standard is needed to guide the translation of Tang poetry. Given the disharmonies between languages, cultures and poetics that have troubled poetry translators, Dr Wang Feng (2015) put forward the "Harmony-Guided Three-Level Poetry Translation Criteria", which offers guidelines and solutions for poetry translation.

II. Harmony-Guided Three-Level Poetry Translation Criteria

"Harmony-Guided Three-Level Poetry Translation Criteria" (Wang, 2015) can be divided into three levels, namely the macro, meso and micro level. At the macro level, the basic thought of harmony is used for reference, analyzing six kinds of disharmony caused by the differences in language and culture in Chinese and English poetry. At the meso level, "Similarity in Styles, Senses and Poetic Conceptions" is put forward. At the micro-level, "Eight Beauties Criteria" are proposed based on classical theories.

2.1 The Macro Level: Harmony

Due to the differences and opposites between Chinese and English poetry in terms of language, culture and poetics, there are various disputes in the practice and standards of poetry translation. Traditional translation studies focus on such issues as a literal translation, liberal translation, translatability, untranslatability and so on. To face the dilemma, it is necessary to avoid bias and accept the theory of "harmony" in poetry translation, which is inherited from ancient Chinese philosophy, and "beauty of harmony" in classical Chinese aesthetics, which boasts a long history of theoretical origin.

2.2 The Meso Level: Similarity in Styles, Senses and Poetic Conceptions

2.2.1 Similarity in Styles

As Tang poetry has so many styles, it should not be translated into a single style. Translators should apply a variety of translation methods and cultural translation strategies to retain its style and cultural charm. They need to understand its stylistic characteristics before translating, choose the original poems that are close to their style, and try to make the source and target styles similar in translation.

2.2.2 Similarity in Senses

As we all know, Chinese culture belongs to high-context culture while English-speaking countries low-context culture. To translate poetry from high context culture into low context culture, explicit translation strategy should be adopted properly to achieve similarity in senses.

2.2.3 Similarity in Poetic Conceptions

Similarity in poetic conceptions means that the comprehensive effect of artistic conception produced by the translated poem in the readers' mind is similar to that produced by the original poem in the readers' mind. "Poetic conception" is the core category of ancient Chinese literary theory and aesthetics, and the soul of ancient Chinese literary aesthetics. In poetry translation, we should not only fully understand the content of the original poem, but also understand the poet's thoughts, feelings and implication, and make efforts to convey the original artistic conception.

2.3 The Micro level: Eight Beauties

Beauty is the most important quality in artworks. Wang Feng (2015) developed eighty beauties (the beauty of form, musicality, image, emotion, suggestiveness, diction, allusion, and gestalt) for poetry translation.

III. A Contrastive Analysis on the Translations of a Tang Poem

3.1 Introduction to Li Bai, his "Invitation to Wine," and its English Versions

Li Bai (701–762), also known as Li Po, courtesy name Tai Bai, was a Chinese poet acclaimed from his day to the present as a genius and a romantic figure who took traditional poetic forms to new heights. In the West, multilingual translations of Li's poems continue to be made. His life has even taken on a legendary aspect, including tales of drunkenness, chivalry, and the well-known fable that Li drowned himself when he reached from his boat to grasp the moon's reflection in the river while drunk.

"Invitation to Wine" is a poem created by Li Bai, following the ancient theme of *Yuefu*. With a deep ideological content and mature artistic performance, it has the greatest impact. The poet indulged in drinking and singing, used wine to relieve his sorrow, and expressed his deep and indignant feelings of life.

The original Chinese poem goes:

将进酒

君不见，黄河之水天上来，奔流到海不复回。
君不见，高堂明镜悲白发，朝如青丝暮成雪！
人生得意须尽欢，莫使金樽空对月。
天生我材必有用，千金散尽还复来。
烹羊宰牛且为乐，会须一饮三百杯。
岑夫子，丹丘生，将进酒，杯莫停。
与君歌一曲，请君为我倾耳听。
钟鼓馔玉不足贵，但愿长醉不复醒。
古来圣贤皆寂寞，惟有饮者留其名。
陈王昔时宴平乐，斗酒十千恣欢谑。
主人何为言少钱，径须沽取对君酌。
五花马、千金裘，
呼儿将出换美酒，
与尔同销万古愁！

And the translations studied are from famous scholars in both China and the Western world: Zhao Yanchun (version 1); Stephen Owen (version 2); Xu Yuanchong (version 3).

Version 1:

Don't you espy

The Yellow River surge down from the sky;

Up to the sea it does tumble and flow.

Don't you espy

To my white hair in the mirror I sigh,

That at dawn is black and at dusk turns snow.

Do enjoy life while in prime you run high;

Not to the moon just your empty cup ply.

So, born by heaven we must be of use;

Spend all the money and more will come up.

Cook lamb, kill cattle just for joy profuse;

Do gulp down three hundred fills from your cup.

Cen, my teacher,

Dan Qiu, friend mine,

Don't put down cups,

Do drink the wine.

I'll sing you a song of cheer,

Please listen, prick up your ear.

Bells, drums and dainties are precious no more;

Drink ourselves drunk, ne'er sober, lying down.

Obscure are the sages and saints of yore,

Only drinkers can enjoy high renown.

At olden times Prince Chen held a great feast;

He drank barrels and barrels with no stall.

How can a host claim to have money least?

I shall buy more and drink up to you all.

Dapple equines,

Gold fur that shines.

Call our son to pawn them, buy wine, buy more,

With you I will drink off our age-long sore.

(Tr. by Zhao Yanchun)

Version 2:

*See the waters of the Yellow River leap down from Heaven,
Roll away to the deep sea and never turn again!
See at the mirror in the High Hall
Aged men bewailing white locks –
In the morning, threads of silk,
In the evening flakes of snow.
Snatch the joys of life as they come and use them to the full;
Do not leave the silver cup idly glinting at the moon.
The things that Heaven made Man was meant to use;
A thousand guilders scattered to the wind may come back again.
Roast mutton and sliced beef will only taste well
If you drink with them at one sitting three hundred cups.
Great Master Ts'êen, Doctor Tan-ch'iu,
Here is wine, do not stop drinking
But listen, please, and I will sing you a song.
Bells and drums and fine food, what are they to me
Who only want to get drunk and never again be sober?
The Saints and Sages of old times are all stock and still,
Only the might drinkers of wine have left a name behind.
When the prince of Ch'êen gave a feast in the Palace of P'ing-lo
With twenty thousand gallons of wine he loosed mirth and play.
The master of the feast must not cry that his money is all spent;
Let him send to the tavern and fetch wine to keep our tankards filled.
His five-flower horse and thousand-guilder coat –
Let him call the boy to take them along and pawn them for good wine,
That drinking together we may drive away the sorrows of a thousand years.*

(Tr. by Stephen Owen)

Version 3:

*Do you not see the Yellow River come from the sky?
Rushing into the sea and ne'er come back?
Do you not see the mirrors bright in chambers high?
Grieve o'er your snow-white hair though once it was silk-black?
When hopes are won,
Oh! Drink your fill in high delight,
And never leave your wine-cup empty in moonlight.
Heaven has made us talents, we're not made in vain.
A thousand gold coins spent, more will turn up again.
Kill a cow, cook a sheep and let us merry be,
And drink three hundred cupfuls of wine in high glee.
Dear friends of mine,
Cheer up, cheer up!
I invite you to wine.
Do not put down your cup!
I will sing you a song, please hear,*

*O, hear! Lend me a willing ear!
What difference will rare and costly dishes make?
I only want to get drunk and never to wake.
How many great men were forgotten through the ages?
But real drinkers are more famous than sober sages.
The Prince of Poets feast in his palace at will,
Drank wine at ten thousand a cask and laughed his fill.
A host should not complain of money he is short,
To drink with you I will sell things of any sort.
My fur coat worth a thousand coins of gold
And my flower-drappled horse may be sold
To buy good wine that we may drown the woes age-old.*

(Tr. by Xu Yuanchong)

3.2 Analysis of English Versions Based on the ‘Harmony-Guided Criteria for Poetry Translation’

3.2.1 Analysis at the Macro Level

English pays attention to hypotaxis while Chinese parataxis. The differences between English and Chinese lead to the controversy of translation standards. To get rid of disputes, we should avoid dichotomies and accept the translation standard of "harmony". From version 1, we can see that the translator extremely focuses on rules of rhyming. Most lines are following the patterns of (a, b, a, b), which shows the esthetic perception of people. While, in version 2, Stephen Owen, as a foreign translator, translates the poem mostly for readability. In this way, the connotation somewhat remains, but the beauty of rhyme in the Tang poem is lost. In version 3, Xu Yuanchong balances hypotaxis and parataxis, achieving harmony at the macro level.

3.2.2 Analysis at the Meso Level

Firstly, in stylistic similarity, we should strive to grasp the bold and unconstrained character of the original. As a well-known poet, Li Bai conveyed the particular style of drinking and singing and expressed a profound feeling of life, which achieved a strong effect. Among the three translations, two are similar in style with the source poem, only Stephen Owen's is a little plain in style. Although the readers can read and understand it easily, it is difficult to convey the heroic style in the original poem.

Secondly, in terms of sense similarity, the three versions are quite different in conveying the original meaning. And Stephen Owen's version 2 is the most reasonable and faithful to the original text. In the past, "Tian" (天) was not only a natural thing in a simple sense but also a mythical one. Stephen Owen's version of "Heaven" is loyal to the original poem. Comparatively speaking, Owen's version is successful in this regard.

Finally, referring to the poetic conception, the poem is rich in natural images and human events, conveying the poet's bold and broad emotions. For instance, the fifth line in the poem “烹羊宰牛且为乐，会须一饮三百杯” shows the author's strongly unrestrained personality. In translation, the translator must translate the artistic conception closest to the original poem. In version 2, Stephen Owen translates “烹羊宰牛” into “Roast mutton and sliced beef”, presenting the author's heroic character in a mediocre and civilian way. In version 3, although Xu faithfully conveys the intention of the original text, “let us merry be” is slightly unnatural. In version 1, Zhao Yanchun translates it into “just for joy profuse,” which not only conveys the conception of the original text accurately but also embodies the author's care-free and open-minded character.

3.2.3 Analysis at the Micro Level

Based on Xu Yuanchong's theory of "Three Beauties", Peter Newmark's translation aesthetic point of view, etc., Dr Wang Feng (2015) has integrated eight new standards of poetry translation -- Beauty of form, musicality, image, emotion, suggestiveness, diction, allusion, and gestalt to guide poetry translation practice.

3.2.3.1 Beauty of Form

Beauty of form refers to the external form of poetry itself, including the number, arrangement, length, indentation and structure of poetry and so on. There is a typical formal beauty in Tang poetry--symmetry due to the external form of Chinese characters, while English does not have. It is difficult to achieve complete consistency in the form of poetry translation. But English poetry, especially metrical poetry, also has its symmetrical beauty. The number of syllables in almost every line of Stephen Owen's version 2 is different. In Xu Yuanchong's version 3, most lines have the same syllables. In adjacent lines of Zhao Yanchun's translation (version 1), most of the syllables are the same, which can be said to have made great success in the beauty of form.

3.2.3.2 Beauty of Musicality

Beauty of musicality refers to the aesthetic feeling formed by the tone, rhythm and rhyme of syllables in poetry. As this poem follows the ancient theme of *Yuefu*, translations should reproduce the beauty of musicality. Zhao Yanchun's translation (version 1) and Xu Yuanchong's (version 3) use the common cadence of English poetry. Zhao's translation adopts the rhyming scheme of ABAB while Xu's version uses the rhyming scheme of AABB. Thus, the beauty of musicality comes naturally.

3.2.3.3 Beauty of Image

Image is an important term in Chinese classical literary theory, poetics and aesthetics. It refers to the organic combination of subjective feelings and external images. In aesthetic activities, the reader's feelings are closely related to the creation of images (Zhu Zhirong, 2016). In terms of images, three translators, in the second line (君不见，高堂明镜悲白发，朝如青丝暮成雪) all expressed the author's sighing for the short and bitter life. But, Zhao Yanchun's translation (version 1) is better because Zhao adopted the word "espy", which means "to see somebody/something suddenly". It shows the fleeting time and laments the shortness of life at the same time, achieving the beauty of the image.

3.2.3.4 Beauty of Emotion

Beauty of emotion refers to the poet's thoughts and feelings of joy, anger, sorrow, love, hate, etc. expressed using material or subjective expressions. Although line 4 (天生我材必有用) expresses Li Bai's broad-minded character, it's also a protest and complaint against reality. It would be more appropriate to translate this line into the passive meaning that the author is entrusted by Heaven, rather than the poet is actively striving for them. So, Zhao Yanchun's translation (version 1) reads fluently and expresses the poet's infinite melancholy incisively and vividly.

3.2.3.5 Beauty of Suggestiveness

Beauty of suggestiveness is one of the most significant aesthetic characteristics in classical Chinese poetry. When translating poems, translators should be aware of the great charm of this kind of beauty and properly reproduce the implicit beauty in the translated version. Line 3, "人生得意须尽欢," is seemingly broad-minded. It is full of the poet's infinite grief and indignation. In the infinite frustration, worry and sorrow, it seems that happiness is precious when we are satisfied. In this aspect, Xu Yuanchong's version 3 is relatively more implicit than Zhao Yanchun's translation (version 1) and Stephen Owen's translation (version 2).

3.2.3.6 Beauty of Diction

The beauty of diction in poetry translation requires the translator to respect the hard work of the original author in his creation, strive for perfecting the translated versions and make the language form at the level of words and phrases suitable for the content to be expressed. The last line (与尔同销万古愁) is the climax of the whole poem. It depicts the poet's psychology that he urgently needs to extricate

himself from the rough situation by drinking wine, and reflects the poet's depressed feeling after his aspiration was violently hit by the harsh reality. The finishing touch of "万古愁" has become the "main battle field" for the three translated versions. "The sorrows of a thousand years" in Stephen Owen's version 2 is the result of a literal translation. Xu Yuanchong's "the woes age-old" is relatively plain. "Age-long sore" is used in Zhao Yanchun's version 1. "Sore," in the dictionary, has the meaning of "upset and angry, especially because you have been treated unfairly". The use of this word can greatly sublimate the degree and connotation of "sorrow". So, Zhao Yanchun's "age-long sore" is better in rendering the beauty of diction.

3.2.3.7 Beauty of Allusion

Allusion refers to the aesthetic feeling of allusion in poetry in the eyes of readers. Allusions contain profound characteristics of Chinese traditional culture. Proper quotation of allusions can make the poem concise, implicit, meaningful, and arouse readers' interest. In the line of "陈王昔时宴平乐", three translated versions are "Prince of Poets", "Prince Chen" and "prince of Ch'ên" respectively. With this allusion, Li Bai expressed his deep sympathy for Cao Zhi's failure to be appreciated but repeatedly depressed. The three versions are all faithful to the host of the banquet, and can also show the poet's admiration for Cao Zhi's "outstanding talents".

3.2.3.8 Beauty of Gestalt

The above seven kinds of specific beauty can be analyzed concretely, but the specific beauties cannot cover all the unique connotations of beauty in different lines. As Gestalt theory points out, "The whole of perceptual experience is more than the sum of its parts." It is of great significance to grasp the reappearance of these beauties as a whole and reproduce the gestalt beauty of a poem in translation. "The beauty of numbers" and "the beauty of perspective conversion" (Wang, 2015) belong to the beauty of gestalt. In line 4 (千金散尽还复来), Li Bai believes that he can spend money but not be slaves to money. It's spirited enough to amaze all ordinary people. Here, "千金" may not be a specific number, but a metaphor. Therefore, Zhao Yanchun's translation (version 1) better conveyed the beauty of gestalt.

IV Conclusion

"Harmony-Guided Three-Level Poetry Translation Criteria" provides a more comprehensive and specific perspective for poetry translation. It not only offers specific theoretical guidance for beginners, but also provides a new, operable, and effective standard for evaluating poetry translation. We can adopt this theory to translate outstanding Chinese poetry into English and do our best for the internationalization of Chinese literature.

Funding: This work was supported by the National Social Science Fund of China under Grant [Key Project 17AZD040].

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