

# A study of poetry translation from the perspective of translation aesthetics - a case study of *300 Tang Poems*

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**Abstract:** Classical Chinese poetry can be said to be a bright treasure of Chinese culture, showing the beauty of Chinese culture. It is known for the artistic conception, vivid image and concise language. In order to promote Chinese culture, we should tell Chinese stories to the world. From the perspective of two principles of the translation aesthetics, applying literature review, the thesis interprets the classic cases of the poem translation in the famous translation of *300 Tang Poems* translated by Xu Yuanchong and analyses the translation strategies.

**Key words:** poetry translation; translation aesthetics; translation

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## 1 Introduction

Tang poetry is the greatest accomplishment in the development of Chinese poetry, showing the generous and colorful Chinese culture. It is characterized by a wide range of subjects, diverse styles and many genres. The most important thing is that Tang poetry owns the beauty of feelings, mood and form, with much artistic values. It is extremely necessary to analyze the translation of Tang poetry from the perspective of translation aesthetics. From the perspective of translation aesthetics, this paper makes an in-depth analysis of the aesthetic features of Tang poetry translation in order to reproduce the aesthetic value of poetry translation for readers.

## 2 Introduction to translation aesthetics

The study of translation aesthetics in China has a long history. Lin Yutang also proposed fidelity, smoothness and beauty; Xu Yuanchong also put forward the theory of triple beauties in poetry translation, which includes the beauty of sense, sound and form. These translators have attached importance to beauty in translation to a certain extent. In Introduction to Translation and Aesthetics, Liu Miqing analyzes formal system and non-formal system, aesthetic subject and aesthetic object. According to translation aesthetics, the formal system is an aesthetically perceptible element of aesthetic representation, which can be perceived by the aesthete through speech, text, words and sentences. The non-formal system is the aesthetic non-representational element of the original text, which is not directly reflected in the aesthetic symbol, and is an aesthetic fuzzy set sublimated by the formal system. The formal system and the non-formal system complement each other in appearance and in meaning. The aesthetic object refers to the original text and the translation, the aesthetic subject refers to the translator and the reader, and the aesthetic subject is subject to the aesthetic object [1]. An excellent translation requires the aesthetic subject to recognize and appreciate the beauty as well as to reproduce and create study.

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### 3 The analysis of Tang poetry translation strategies under the form system aesthetics

In Ma Huijuan's view, the cultural factors in translating are more significant than the purely linguistic differences [2]. Relying on a large number of monosyllabic words in ancient Chinese as the basic vocabulary, classical Chinese poetry formed the unique rhythm, including the combination of syllables, tones and tones, the regularity of antithesis. From the moment of its birth, poetry has been closely combined with sound, and the effect of language can also infect readers' feelings. The choice of words and sentence patterns also are the decisive factor for the beauty of the poem. In translation aesthetics, one of the most basic aesthetic principles is to see whether its structure has the characteristics of "balance and harmony". In poetry, the formal beauty is often shown by duality or antithesis.

#### 3.1 Sound beauty

Example 1: Deng Gao (by poet Du Fu)

Original poem: Wu bian luo mu xiao xiao xia, Bu jin chang jiang gun gun lai.

Translation poem: The boundless forest sheds its leaves shower by shower; The endless river rolls its waves hour after hour.

This poem is a seven-word verse, with strict rules for tone pattern. The poet, Du Fu, respectively uses "sheds" and "rolls" to describe the sound of fallen leaves and running water, which not only reminds people of the sound of fallen trees and the turbulent Yangtze River, but also conveys the sense of time flies and ambition being difficult to achieve. When Xu Yuanchong translated this poem, he noticed the beauty of the form and rhythm in the original poem. Peter Newmark said, sound-effects, even on the level beyond the sentence, should be taken into account, not only in poetry, but in jingles [3]. The phrases "shower by shower" and "hour after hour" in the translation show this contrast vigorously. It is ingenious to see that "shower by shower" and the word "xiao xiao" is similar in sound. The words are neat in the form, such as "boundless" and "endless", "leaves" and "waves", which has a musical quality.

#### 3.2 Word beauty

Example 2. Shi Zhi Sai Shang (by poet Wang Wei)

Original poem: Da mo gu yan zhi, Chang he luo ri yuan.

Translation poem: In boundless desert lonely smoke rises straight; Over endless river the sun sinks round.

In this poem, the river shows a line while the sunset is a circle. The words are concise, but give readers a stronger visual punch. Mr. Xu Yuanchong used the words "boundless desert" and "endless river" to describe the "da mo" and "chang he", which expressed the broad artistic conception. The desert is desolate, while the lonely smoke on the beacon tower is particularly striking, so the author uses a literal translation to convey the tall and straight and resolute beauty of the lonely smoke to the reader. The translator also uses addition, adds two verbs, "rise" and "sinks", which belongs to semantic addition. Hence readers can sense the picture where there have the rising lonely smoke, the endless river and the magnificent sunset. The word "lonely" in the poem seems to be written about the smoke rising, but it is actually a portrayal of the poet's inner loneliness. Xu Yuanchong's translation of the word "lonely" in the poem is very clever. It is preferable to translate "chang he" as "endless river" rather than "long river", reflecting the beauty of the Yellow River's endless stretch and spectacular scenery.

#### 3.3 Sentence beauty

Example 3. Chun Jiang Hua Yue Ye (by poet Zhang Ruoxu)

Original poem: Bai yun yi pian qu you you, Qing feng pu shang bu sheng chou.

Translation poem: Away, away is sailing a single cloud white; on Farewell Beach are pining away maples green.

These two verses continue the author's lament about the eternal universe and his thoughts on life, and give rise to the

description of the sorrow of the wanderer. The translator adopts the literal translation method for the translation of first sentence. The image of "white cloud" has the characteristic of drifting away, which is easy for readers to associate with the state of wandering away gradually, implying that wandering away from home and drifting without any support. Therefore, there is no obstacle for the readers of the target language to understand this word. Xu Yuanchong' translation uses "away, away" to describe the "leisurely" state of white clouds, which is vivid and helps the readers of the target language to feel the loneliness of the wanderer in a foreign land. The word "pu" usually refers to the place of parting. For the image of "Qing feng pu", Xu adopts domestication translation strategy. It was translated as Farewell Beach, pointing out that this is the farewell place of the husband who left home and solitary women. "Pine away" in the translation reflects delicate emotions, and "maples green" and "cloud white" present a strong sense of contrast, which can guide the target readers to place themselves in the parting scene described by the poet, so as to get a more authentic emotional experience.

#### **4 Analysis of Tang poetry translation strategies under non-formal system aesthetics**

Non-formal system aesthetics holds that the aesthetic composition of language form is usually countable, but its charm, temperament, artistic conception, emotion and other factors cannot be counted. Therefore, how to convey the inherent beauty in poetry accurately and naturally is a major challenge for translators.

##### 4.1 Emotion

Example 4. Huanghe Lou Song Meng Haoran Zhi Guang Ling (by poet Li Bai)

Original poem: Gu fan yuan ying bi kong jin, Wei jian chang jiang tian ji liu.

Translation poem: His lessening sail is lost in the boundless blue sky; Where I see but the endless River rolling by.

The lonely sailboat gradually faded away at the end of the blue sky, only to see the turbulent Yangtze River rushing to the sky. The poem seems to describe a scene, but in fact the poet entrusts his farewell friendship to the river. In Nida's view, to preserve the content of the poem, the form must be changed [4]. The phrase "gu fan yuan ying" is translated as "his lessening sail", the translator added the word "his" to make the reader understand that the poet expresses his farewell feelings for his friends by writing about the ship's departure. In the second sentence, "tian ji liu" is translated as "rolling by", which shows the torrent of rivers. But compared with the original poem, this magnificent feeling is still not strong enough. The word "but" also embodies the meaning of only seeing. Emotion is generally the most important pillar of poetry, but it is indescribable, and sometimes the reader needs to slowly understand the poem meaning. The Yangtze River is rolling away, while the friend's boat is getting smaller and smaller. This strong sense of contrast highlights the parting feeling, and the translator also conveys its beauty and moving.

##### 4.2 Artistic conception

Example 5. Su Jian De Jiang (by poet Meng Haoran)

Original poem: Ye kuang tian di shu, Jiang qing yue jin ren.

Translation poem: On boundless plain trees seem to scrape the sky; In water clear the moon appears so nigh.

The wilderness is endless, and the distant sky is lower than the nearby trees; the river is clear, but the bright moon is more intimate with people. The translation of "tian di shu", translated by Mr. Xu Yuanchong as "trees seem to scrape the sky", has changed the focus of the sentence, taking the tree as the subject and the verb as "scrape". And the translator used personification, vividly conveying the meaning of the original poem and making it easy for readers to understand. "yue jin ren" is translated as "the moon appears so nigh", which uses free translation to convey the poet's sense of loneliness. However, "trees seem to scrape the sky" and "the moon appears so nigh" in the original poem are opposite, so the translation loses some charm. The non-image elements constituting the original aesthetic are non-intuitive, difficult to understand, and therefore very vague. Although the translator tries his best to restore the connotation, form and other

factors of the poem to the greatest extent, the processing of artistic conception is still a little short.

## **5 Conclusion**

Tang poetry, as the essence of Chinese culture, has a high aesthetic value. Through research and analysis, the author finds that in the aesthetics of form system, Mr. Xu Yuanchong's translations naturally complete the beauty of sound, word and sentence. There is also a high degree of completion in the aesthetics of non-formal system. Sometimes, translators will omit some words in order to pursue formal beauty. All in all, these examples prove that the theory of translation aesthetics to guide the translation research of poetry is of constructive significance, and is an important standard to test the aesthetic feeling of poetry translation.

## **Conflicts of interest**

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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