



## Comparative Analysis of the Two English Versions of *Qiangjinjiu* Based on Translation Aesthetics

GAO Yaping<sup>[a],\*</sup>; LI Yuying<sup>[a]</sup>

<sup>[a]</sup>Foreign Language College, Jiangxi Normal University, Nanchang, China.

\*Corresponding author.

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### Abstract

Poetry is the creation of beauty and thus aesthetics is an important translation criterion for poetry. By fully understanding the two English translated versions of *Qiangjinjiu* respectively by Xu Yuanhong and Burton Watson, the thesis will make a comparative analysis of the two versions from the perspective of translation aesthetics. In order to better illustrate the connotation of poetry translation and translation aesthetics, the essay will mainly compare the poetic representation of the two English versions from the aspects of rhythm, form, image, culture and content, targeting to present the differences between the two English versions and offer some suggestions on poetry translation.

**Key words:** Poetry translation; Translation aesthetics; *Qiangjinjiu*

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### INTRODUCTION

In China, poetry has developed for a long time and formed its profound cultural connotation. As the heyday of classical Chinese poetry, the Tang Dynasty produced many famous and outstanding poets such as Li Po, Tu Fu and Bai Juyi. As a romantic poet, Li Po has been enjoying a high reputation in the poetic history of China.

He has created a large number of poems among which *Qiangjinjiu* is one of the masterpieces of Li Po on wine chant, and there are many different English versions of it. It is of necessity and significance to make a comparison of the English versions of *Qiangjinjiu* so as to better understand the poem and the art of poetry translation. Meanwhile, since translation aesthetics is closely related to poetry translation, the thesis will mainly analyze the poem *Qiangjinjiu* from the perspective. It intends to get more familiar with translation aesthetics and the approach to poetry translation.

## 1. TRANSLATION AESTHETICS AND POETRY TRANSLATION

### 1.1 Translation Aesthetics

Aesthetics is regarded as a branch of philosophy and art (Hornby, 2002). Fang (2004) defined translation aesthetics as revealing the origins and special significance of aesthetics of translation studies and applying basic principles of aesthetics to put forward different aesthetic standards of different texts. By amply comprehending the basic properties of the aesthetic object and aesthetic subject, translation aesthetics analyzes the relationship between them and aims to provide translation types and means to guide the practice of aesthetic reproduction.

In both the Chinese and Western history, translation aesthetic principles were put forward in an early time. Liu (2005), a synthesizer of translation aesthetics, made a systematic analysis of the theory, thus promoting the perfection of translation aesthetics. Aesthetics has an impact on various branches of translation, guiding various forms of translation activities, especially in literary translation. Although in poetry translation, there are some different translation theories, which include the principle of “three beauties” put forward by Xu Yuanhong, most of them put great emphasis on the unity of poetic beauty.

Translation aesthetics is closely related to many linguistic subjects such as stylistics, lexicology, rhetoric, semantics etc. They require the translator to discover the aesthetic features and values as well as to reproduce the beauty of the original text at utmost. Therefore, it is important to set up a correct translation principle to guide the translation behavior.

## 1.2 Poetry Translation and Translation Aesthetics

According to Li (2001), the aesthetics of poetry can be described as visual beauty, rhythmic beauty, stylistic beauty, and imagery beauty. The visual beauty of poetry can be achieved by the arrangement of characters, choice of words and diversity of sentences. The rhythmic beauty refers to the beauty of sound and rhythm. The stylistic beauty is related to the personal writing style of poets while the imagery beauty is about the artistic conception and the image that contain the author's emotion. To be more specific, the aesthetics of poetry is closely associated with phoneme, lexis, rhetoric, syntax and discourse. Poetry pays much attention to rhythm and it often follows special rhythmic patterns. Moreover, the rhythm of poetry is constructed by lexis. Rhetoric is also an important element in poetry, and there are dozens of rhetoric devices such as metaphor, symbolism, alliteration, parallelism, antithesis, hyperbole and so on. As for the syntax and discourse, they offer us an overall impression on the features and style of poetry. Anyway, the form of poetic beauty would always update with the development of times, but its contents seldom make change.

Mao (2005) believed that the combination of aesthetics and translation is perfect and a heaven-made match, which is particularly true of poetry translation that attaches great importance to aesthetic beauty and aesthetic representation. Translation aesthetics is of great benefits for us to fully understand the nature of poetry. In general, there are two principal approaches to translate poetry: metrical translation and non-metrical translation. The former lays stress on the beauty of form and the later prefers to express the artistic conception of the original poem in prose. The representatives of metrical translation include Giles and Xu Yuanchong while the representatives of non-metrical translation include Robert Frost, Sussan Bassnet, Ezra Pound and Burton Watson. They all embody different aesthetic principles and ideas in poetry translation. Although putting emphasis on various aspects and styles, the core of their advocacy is to achieve a kind of beauty.

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## 2. COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE TWO ENGLISH VERSIONS

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### 2.1 Introduction About the Two English Versions

*Qiangjinjiu* is a topic of Yuefu songs before the Tang dynasty. The poem *Qiangjinjiu* shows Li Po's rebellious

character actively: On one hand, he is self-confident, aloof and pride; on the other hand, he turns to indulge in the pleasures of enjoyment after a political failure. In general, the poem is bold, effusive, fluent and it has a strong appeal.

#### 2.1.1 Xu Yuanchong and His Version

Xu Yuanchong is one of the most famous and excellent translators in China. As a translation master, Xu Yuanchong has a very deep understanding of the poetry translation. His translation principle of "three beauties" originated from Lu Xun's article about "three beauties", which is now an important standard for poetry translation. The principle of "three beauties". Xu Yuanchong has translated many classical Chinese literature, among which includes the Analects of Confucius and The Songs of the Chu. The translation of *Qiangjinjiu* by Xu Yuanchong is one of his works in Three Hundred Poems of the Tang Dynasty. It also reflects Xu's translation principle and his processing techniques.

#### 2.1.2 Burton Watson and His Version

Burton Watson is also a famous translator of the Chinese poetry. Burton Watson has translated many Chinese poems such as those of Po Chu-i: Selected Poems and An Introduction to Sung Poetry. His aim to translate Chinese literary works is to popularize the Chinese culture to common readers instead of making academic research. Therefore, the basic features of his translation are fluency, smoothness, readability and understand-ability. He is extremely interested in Chinese culture and hopes to retain to the hilt the characteristics of Chinese culture in his translation. The translation of *Qiangjinjiu* by Watson is also very typical and deserves of appreciating.

To be fair, both the two English versions of *Qiangjinjiu* have their own features and style. Also, there are two different kinds of beauty contained in the two versions. Thus it is meaningful to have an overall analysis of them from the perspective of translation aesthetics.

## 2.2 Comparative Analysis of the Two English Versions

### 2.2.1 Aesthetic Representation in Form and Rhythm

The form of poetry serve the content, and the content and form of poetry are inseparable (Bassnett & Andre, 2001). In *Qiangjinjiu*, most of the sentences are seven-character-based, and others are three, five and ten-character sentences. Besides, the length of them is alternated with long and short, and the rhythm changes with the emotion. In form, Xu's translation accords more with the original poem than Watson's. The translation of Watson is more prose-like, and the length of sentences is various and uneven while Xu's appears to be more neat and orderly, being closer to the writing style of the original. However, both of the two translations have their own levels of aesthetic representation in form.

Just as Simpson (1975) viewed that the ideas and thoughts of poetry were expressed by rhythm. The beauty of rhythm or sound is also an indispensable factor for people to make a judgment on a poem. In Xu's translation, the rhythm is more obvious than Watson's. As mentioned above, the form of Xu's version is closer to the original

poem, so is the sound. In order to reproduce the sound beauty of the original poem, Xu makes full use of his creativity to form a rhythm of abab ccddee fgfghh iijjkk llmmm among those sentences. In contrast, because of the adoption of the free verse, Watson's translation puts less heed on rhythm and consequently seems to have no specific rhythmic pattern. But Baker (2004) once mentioned that even the modern-style poetry or free verse has certain special sound pattern. After reading Watson's translation, one can find that there is also a potential rhythm in the poem. By this token, both the two versions have their own rhythmic beauty.

On the whole, Xu's translation is closer to the original poet in form and rhythm, and it also represents the formal and rhythmic beauty of *Qiangjinjiu* by this way. In comparison, although Watson's translation is not equivalent to the form and rhythm of the original poem, it creates another kind of artistic conception that is different from Xu's. On this foundation, it also achieves the poetic beauty.

### 2.2.2 Aesthetic Representation in Image

Image is a vital element of a poem, and the nature and power of poems are constituted by the combination of ideas, feelings and images contained in them. Heidegger (1975) insisted that the poetic flavor come from abundant images. For poetry, image is a necessary carrier of the poetic beauty. In *Qiangjinjiu*, there are many vivid and powerful images such as “黄河”, “青丝”, “白发”, “金樽”, “千金裘”, “五花马” etc. With these images, the analysis will be carried out by making specific examples.

In Watson's translation, the word “黄河” is translated into “Yellow River waters”, while in Xu's is the “Yellow River”. Apparently the former is better, for it stresses “some waters of Yellow River”, but “the whole Yellow River”. The former seems to be more persuasive and reasonable in the poem. For “金樽”, another image, Watson rendered it into “golden cask” and Xu “wine-cup”. Actually “金樽” here refers to “酒杯” and Xu's is closer to the original than Watson's. To be more concrete, Watson's exaggerates and distorts the meaning of the original one. In the translation of “千金裘”, Watson's is “furs” and Xu's is “fur coat”. According to the original poem, the word “千金裘” means a kind of precious and rare fur. Both the two translations do not embody the meaning of “precious and rare”, hence losing the complete connotation of the image and being not consistent with the original image. Besides, for the sentence “朝如青丝暮成雪”, Watson's translation is “their black silk of morning by evening turned to snow?” (Watson, 1984), while Xu's is “Grieve o'er your snow-white hair though once it was silk-black?” (Xu, 2007). In this sentence, there is a picture of dynamic images that brings readers visual impact. From this point, translating this sentence properly appears to be especially important. Watson's translation objectively depicts the momentary change from black silk to snow,

while Xu's does not have this kind of effect as it cannot show people the transience from morning to evening.

### 2.2.3 Aesthetic Representation in Content and Culture

The content of a poem includes many things. Broadly speaking, form is also a part of content. The content also involves the author's feelings and emotion at that time. Text interpretation is a kind of unique behavior and different recipients will have different responses to the text (Hatim & Mason, 2001). In other words, different aesthetic subjects would take different translation methods to render the content of the original text. In the translation of *Qiangjinjiu*, Watson and Xu have adopted different methods to deal with some contents. Here are some examples.

Example 1:

The original:

① 钟鼓馔玉不足贵,

② 古来圣贤多寂寞,

Watson's translation: (Watson, 1984)

① Bells and rums, food rare as jade-these aren't worth prizing;

② Sages and worthies from antiquity all gone into silence;

Xu's translation: (Xu, 2007)

① What difference will rare and costly dishes make?

② How many great men were forgotten through the ages?

Analysis: From the above example, it is easy to find that Xu's and Watson's methods of translating the two lines are totally distinct. Watson adopts common declarative mood to translate while Xu employs rhetorical question to translate, and they are respectively literal translation and free translation. In addition, Xu's is more creative and Watson's more flat. The same content is translated in two different styles, which is also hard to make a judgement.

Example 2:

The original:

① 岑夫子, 丹丘生,

② 陈王昔时宴平乐,

Watson's translation: (Watson, 1984)

① Master Ts'en! Scholar Tman-ch'iu!

② The Prince of Ch'en once feasted in the Hall of Calm Delight;

Xu's translation: (Xu, 2007)

① Dear friends of mine,

② The Prince of Poets feast'd in his palace at will,

Analysis: For Watson's translation, the main problem is that he translates “岑夫子”, “丹丘生”, “陈王”, “平乐” directly without fully understanding them. And Xu's is much better in this aspect. In the poem, Li Po quotes

“岑夫子” & “丹丘生” to symbolize his friends, and Xu’s translation conforms with this connotative meaning. Furthermore, the “陈王” refers to Ts’ao Chih. Although Watson’s translation is feasible, Xu’s is more ingenious for his revelation of the deep meaning. Watson renders “平乐” into “Calm Delight”, while Xu transfers it into “palace”. Here Watson’s is too literal and has not dealt with the original one correctly compared with Xu’s.

According to Example 2, Watson’s translation of these culture-loaded words is not as appropriate as Xu’s, probably resulting from his lack of full comprehension of the cultural background of the poem. In this aspect, as a Chinese translator, Xu is more adept at coping with these elements in high proficiency. In effect, culture is also a necessary component of poetry and it can have great impacts on the integration of content. A poem more or less contains cultural elements, and *Qiangjinjiu* is no exception. In this poem, the primary one is the “wine culture”. China is an ancient country famous for its poetry and wine. In China, poetry and wine are often closely linked and they have formed alcohol-poem culture with Chinese characteristics (Gu, 2006). In *Qiangjinjiu*, Li Po expressed his intricate emotions successfully by means of the wine. The following two examples are good illustrations of this type of wine culture.

Example 3: 人生得意须尽欢，莫使金樽空对月。

Watson’s translation: If life is to have meaning, seize every joy you can, do not let the golden cask sit idle in the moonlight. (Watson, 1984)

Xu’s translation: When hopes are won, Oh! Drink your fill in high delight, And never leave your wine-cup empty in moonlight. (Xu, 2007)

Analysis: From the original line, it can be inferred that Li Po is conveying the readers a sense of immediate pleasure. In the two translations, Xu’s has a stronger feeling and better depicts Li Po’s personality and those images while Watson’s seems not to have such an effect.

Example 4: 钟鼓馔玉不足贵，但愿长醉不愿醒。

Watson’s translation: Bells and rums, food rare as jade-these aren’t worth prizing; All I ask is to be drunk forever, never to sober up (Watson, 1984).

Xu’s translation: What difference will rare and costly dishes make? Only want to get drunk and never to wake (Xu, 2007).

Analysis: In this example, Li Po expresses his sorrow and sadness by drinking wine. Here Xu’s tone is still stronger than Watson’s. But both of them have truly represented the author’s emotions. In Li Po’s poetry, the wine is given a special kind of poetic feature. In the state of drunken, Li Po’s life is liberated both in body and soul, and therefore endows his poems certain aesthetic meaning (Zhan, 2011). In *Qiangjinjiu*, the wine is also given a

sense of beauty to strengthen the meaning and connotation of the poem.

By the comparison of Watson’s and Xu’s translation of *Qiangjinjiu*, it can be drawn that the two styles are quite different from each other. Different nations possess distinct languages and cultures, and thus develop their own unique aesthetic set (Barnhart, 1981). In translation of *Qiangjinjiu*, both Watson and Professor Xu have their own translation styles and principles, which is presumably because of the cultural and aesthetic differences between them. Professor Xu is a great Chinese translation master and has been deeply affected by Chinese aesthetic idea. While Watson is a foreigner and his aesthetic idea is quite distinct from Xu’s. Both Xu’s and Watson’s versions have its own merits and demerits. By the comparative analysis of the two English versions of *Qiangjinjiu*, it can also be inferred that in poetry translation, one can stick to his/her own style, and the goal should remain the same: to represent beauty and artistic conception of the original poem that make up the soul of the whole poem. For the purpose of being a translator good at poetry translation, one must try to make full use of their own subjective dynamics and creativity and get better acquaintance with the aesthetic culture of the target language.

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## CONCLUSION

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To a certain degree, translation is a procedure of beauty-appreciation and beauty reproduction or reformation. The thesis not only reasons the differences between the two English versions, but also analyzes the features of poetry language and its relations with translation aesthetics. The development of society inevitably brings us to change and update of aesthetic consciousness. In sequence, translation aesthetics should also keep pace with the development of the world and translators are supposed to have a better understanding of it. Aesthetics is an eternal topic in translation, and it provides us a crucial criterion on how to make and judge a good translation. With that being considered, it is essential to continue developing the translation aesthetics and make full use of it. Also, it is significant to attach more attention to poetry translation with the purpose that the imagination and emotions contained in the original poetry can be expressed forcefully.

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