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Critical Thinking of Applying Nida's Functional Equivalence to Poetry Translation

—A Study Based on English Versions of *Lu Zhai* by Wang Wei

Abstract

Based on the notion that poetry is translatable, this paper will analyze the pros and cons of applying Eugene A. Nida's functional equivalence theory to the translation of *Lu Zhai*, written by a famous Chinese poet Wang Wei in the Tang Dynasty(618-907 CE). Because poetry translation requires translators to transmit both the meaning and beauty of the original poem to the target readers to achieve the similar response. This requirement is consistent with Nida's functional equivalence. But there are still limitations of Nida's functional equivalence theory. Based on the different versions of *Lu Zhai*, this paper will explore the pros and cons of this theory when it is applied to poetry translation.

The paper is composed of an introduction, the main body and the conclusion. Chapter One is the introduction of the research goal and significance, and a general introduction of Nida's functional equivalence theory, and the Chinese poet Wang Wei

as well as his poem *Lu Zhai*. Chapter Two shows a detailed analysis of the pros and cons of applying Nida's functional equivalence theory to poetry translation. Chapter Three is the conclusion of this paper, which summarizes the relation between translation theories and practice. By exploring the pros and cons of applying Nida's functional equivalence to poetry translation, this paper hopes to bring some inspiration to translation studies.

Key Words: Nida; functional equivalence; *Lu Zhai*; emptiness;

Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 Research goal and significance

Is poetry translatable? Robert Frost's remark — “Poetry is what gets lost in translation”, has been accepted for too long. No one denies that a poem loses something in translation but I still reject the notion that poetry is untranslatable.

Then it comes to the question of poetry translation. Is there a general principle to guide the translation of poetry, which has been discussed from many perspectives, such as ecological, semiotic, functional, relative aspect, etc? Among those theories, Nida's functional equivalence theory is noted in this paper. According to him, “translating consists in producing in the receptor language the closest natural equivalent of the source language message, first in terms of meaning and secondly in terms of style” (Nida 1986: 12). On the one hand, Nida's translation theory is based on linguistics, which provides a scientific and systematic approach for translation; on the other hand, poetry as a literary text is more subjective and emotional. Is the theory suitable to guide poetry translation? What sparks or arguments will account for? So this paper will explore whether Nida's functional equivalence is appropriate to guide poetry translation.

Meanwhile the practice of poetry translation is also a hot topic, especially versions from Chinese to English for there are many challenges from unique characteristics and rhetorical devices of Chinese poems, to reproduction of philosophy

and subtle emotion behind simple words. Among so many studies, a book titled *Nineteen ways of looking at Wangwei* by Eliot Weinberger and Octavio Paz, has greatly aroused my interest. The author has analyzed 19 translated versions (mostly in English, along with French and Spanish) of a four-line poem *Lu Zhai* (Chinese pronunciation), written by a famous poet Wang Wei in the Tang Dynasty. This paper will focus on this poem and have a further analysis of different English versions from the perspective of Nida's functional equivalence theory, with the aim to explore the pros and cons of this theory in poetry translation and the significance of bringing some insight to Chinese poetry translation.

1.2 Nida and the evolvement of functional equivalence

“At the beginning of the 20th century, Saussure's *Course in General Linguistics* marked the birth of modern linguistics and laid the foundation for various linguistic methods for contemporary translation studies” (He 5). Eugene A. Nida is a remarkable translation theorist, linguist and a cultural anthropologist. His translation theory can be roughly divided into three development stages, namely, descriptive linguistics, communicative theory and semiotics.

The descriptive linguistics is the first major stage of his translation theories, where his doctoral thesis “*A synopsis of English syntax*” to “*Principles of translation as Exemplified by Bible Translating*” was finished. The second stage is the communication theory stage, starting from 1959 to 1969, when Nida established his authoritative position in western translation theory field. He put forward

“formal-equivalence” and “dynamic-equivalence” in his book *Toward a Science of Translating* in 1964. One Chinese scholar pointed out that Nida used the word “translating” instead of “translation” in the book name, the reason of which could be that Nida treated translation as a process rather than a product. This analysis could be supported in Nida’s later book *The Theory and Practice of Translation* in 1982, co-authored with Charles R. Taber. In this book, four steps of translation are introduced--analysis, transfer, restructuring and testing, providing a systematic way for translators to communicate with both the author and the target reader. On the basis of the communication theory, Nida further developed his semiotics mode of translation thought, which is the third stage of his theory. He replaced “dynamic-equivalence” with “functional equivalence” to make the meaning clearer and insisted that anything could be translated into another language through finding the equivalence of translation and reorganizing the original form and semantic structure in an appropriate way (Zheng 7).

Nida’s functional equivalence theory is the focus of these three stages of evolvement. The word was developed from “dynamic-equivalence”, put forward in *Toward a Science of Translating* in 1964. According to him, “Dynamic equivalence is the closest natural equivalent to the source-language message”, and the focus of attention should be toward the receptor’s response (Nida 1964: 166). Along with “Formal equivalence”, there is no other word in that book--“source-oriented”. That is, it is designed to reveal as much as possible of the form and content of the original message” (Nida 1964: 165).

It was in 1980s that “dynamic-equivalence” was replaced by “functional equivalence” for a clearer and more detailed explanation. He defined “translating consists in producing in the receptor language the closest natural equivalent of the source language message, first in terms of meaning and secondly in terms of style” (Nida 1986: 12). “Equivalent” pays attention to the source-language message; “natural” focuses on the receptor language, and “closest” meant binding “the two orientations together on the basis of the highest degree of approximation” (Nida 1964: 166). In this definition, the receptor’s response is highly emphasized, from which we can see Nida’s functional equivalence theory is actually devoted to communication, which means messages of the source text would always be given full priority then to the form, and to the creation of the maximum similar response among receptors compared with the original readers.

This theory was further developed by Peter Newmark’s communicative and semantic translation theory; Susan Bassnett’s cultural equivalence and manipulation theory, etc. While there are also different ideas at the same time. Lawrence Venuti put forward that Nida’s translation theory was a kind of domestication, thus ignoring the original culture with the intention of colonist arrogance.

The study of Nida’s translation thoughts in China is much more prosperous than that in foreign countries. Tan Zaixi is the first researcher to systematically introduce Nida’s functional equivalence. But he pointed out the emphasis on the receptor’s response ignored the authority of the original to a certain extent. Later years, scholars discussed Nida’s functional equivalence theory from many perspectives. But in the

last decade, the research has declined. Chinese scholars are paying more attention to the analysis of translation theories from a general scope. From above, we can find that Nida's functional equivalence has aroused great interest at home and abroad.

1.3 The introduction of Wang Wei and his poem *Lu Zhai*

Wang Wei(699-761), whose cognomen was Mojie(摩诘), was a government official in the Tang Dynasty(618-907). He was also a scholar, a painter, and perhaps above all a divine Chan Buddhist and poet who is regarded in China as “the Buddha of Poetry” (诗佛) (Stepien 208). He is famous for Chinese landscape poems, also called “Shan Shui”(Mountains and Streams), where imagery is melded with the religio-philosophical thinking, such as “Chan” spirit. Wang Wei's poetry expresses Mahāyāna Buddhist notions of emptiness(*śūnyatā*, 空) as the ultimate reality underlying the conventionally perceptible world. In his poetry often appears words like “Emptiness” and “silence”, and the ontological aporia such as writing of stillness by means of movement, indicating no-self within the natural landscape and the way of realizing one's own Buddha-nature(Emptiness) through unifying and forgetting both oneself and the external objects.

His poem *Lu Zhai* is the 4th of twenty poems in his *Wang Chuan collection*, a representative of Wang's landscape poetry in his late years. “Wang Chuan” is the name of a place in today's Shaanxi province, where the poet bought a house and lived a half reclusive life. The scenery there was very beautiful and peaceful, inspiring Wang Wei's religio-philosophical thinking and the creations of his landscape poetry.

The Chinese form and the character-by-character translation of *Lu Zhai* are as follows:

lù zhai
鹿柴
kōng shān bú jiàn rén,
空山不见人,
dàn wén rén yǔ xiǎng;
但闻人语响;
fǎn jǐng rù shēn lín,
返景入深林,
fù zhào qīng tái shàng
复照青苔上。

Deep Hermitage

<i>Empty</i>	<i>mountain(s)/hill(s)</i>	<i>(negative)</i>	<i>to see</i>	<i>person/people</i>
<i>But</i>	<i>to hear</i>	<i>person/people</i>	<i>words/conversation</i>	<i>sound/echo</i>
<i>To return</i>	<i>bright(ness)/shadow(s)</i>	<i>to enter</i>	<i>deep</i>	<i>forest</i>
<i>To return again</i>	<i>to shine/to reflect</i>	<i>green/black</i>	<i>moss/lichen</i>	<i>above/on (top of)</i>

Lu Zhai is a typical Chinese landscape poem, showing the emptiness and darkness of the mountain from acoustic and visual aspect. The literal meaning of each verse can be translated into—*There is no one in the empty mountain/ Except human's voice/ The sunset is casting its ray in the deep forest/ Shining the green moss again.* We can see there is a paradox of empty mountain compared with human's voice. Since there is no one in the mountain, where does that voice come from? This is because there is a deeper meaning of "Emptiness", related to Buddhism and Taoism. "Empty" here is not "nothing", instead, it means "something". "The poet set off emptiness by means of real, vivid and bright scenery", for example, describing stillness by means of human's voice, darkness by sunshine on the moss, noting the harmonious relationship between humans and the nature, and both the unification and

the forgetting of self and the external objects (Stepien 226). Besides, words like “空山”(empty mountain), “人语” (human’s voices), “返景” (sunset), “青苔” (moss) are often imbued with “Chan” spirit, as well as verbs in the poem like “响” (sound), “入” (enter), “照” (shining), and the sentence relations, all making it difficult for people to fully understand the poem.

While since the 20th century, a time when the linguistic school of translation studies has been greatly developed, this poem has been translated into English, French and Spanish. In 1987, a book titled *Nineteen Ways of Looking at Wang Wei* by Eliot Winberger and Octavio Paz was published, where 16 translated versions of *Lu Zhai* were collected in a diachronic order, including two in French, one in Spanish and the left English, which will be the focus of this paper. How will those translators translate “Emptiness”? Were they influenced by Nida’s functional equivalence theory? Based on those two questions, this paper will analyze the advantages and disadvantages of Nida’s functional equivalence in poetry translation, and bring some inspiration in the translation in this genre.

Chapter 2 The pros and cons of applying Nida's functional equivalence to poetry translation

Nida's functional equivalence theory stresses the receptor's response, which means that the recipient understands and appreciates the translation correctly. When this theory is applied to poetry translation, the advantages are that the translation procedure will be more scientific to produce the functional equivalence of poetic beauty so that the target text will be easier for receptors to understand. However, there are some disadvantages, such as the ignorance of cultural differences and the simplification of the original meaning.

2.1 The pros of applying Nida's functional equivalence to poetry translation

2.1.1 Scientific approach

To achieve functional equivalence, a scientific translation procedure has been put forward by Nida in his *The Theory and Practice of Translation*. There are four steps, namely, analysis, transfer, restructuring and testing. Poetry translation also follows this procedure. Analysis comprises three aspects, the first is analyzing "the meaningful relationships between the words and the combinations of the words", the second "the referential meaning and special combinations of words(or idioms), and the third "the connotative meaning" (Nida 1982: 34). This means that a translator

needs to define the relation between words and what's more, to comprehend not only words as symbols, but also words as prompters of reactions.

When translating the poem *Lu Zhai* into English, it's necessary for translators to comprehend the referential and connotative meaning of words. For example, “返景” in the third line, which means the “returning sunshine”, indicating that it is at dusk. And the word “复照” in the next line is the action of this sunset, being defined as “event” among the four categories of terms according to Nida (Nida 1982: 37). Right analysis of or between the words has been shown in these translated texts, such as “The slanting sun at evening penetrates...” by Soame Jenyns, 1944; “the slanting sunlight/ Casts motley patterns on...” by Chang Yin-nan & Lewis C. Walmsley, 1958; “Returning sunlight/ enters...” by Gary Snyder, 1978 (Weinberger & Paz 12, 16, 42). While some translators didn't show the relation or misunderstood the meaning in their texts, such as “The reflected sunlight pierces...” by James J. Y. Liu, 1962, which didn't make sense in science and failed to show that it was late afternoon (Weinberger & Paz 20).

After the analysis, the second step is to transfer, including the semantic adjustments, which depends on the context, and the structural adjustments covering word, sentence, sound and discourse. Among those adjustments, the specification of relationship should be paid attention to. For example, “但” in the second line of the poem refers to “only” in its implicit meaning rather than “but”. For western readers to understand better, translators should make the implicit meaning explicit. This paves the way for the third and fourth step—restructure and testing. According to Nida, in

order to “make the message well fit the channel capacity of the receptors”, “the only possible solution is to ‘draw out’ the message, that is, to build in redundancy” (Nida 1982: 164). This means that translators should make adjustments such as adding annotation and raising the information from implicit to an explicit level, thus the redundancy can be built to make receptors understand better. For example, in dealing with the seemingly ontological aporia of “no one in the empty mountain” while with “human’s voices”, Kenneth Rexroth divided one line in Chinese into two lines in English in a form appropriate for westerns to understand without losing the deep meaning of the poem. His version is “*Deep in the mountain wilderness/ Where nobody ever comes/ Only once in a great while/ Something like the sound of a far off voice.*”

These four steps, analysis, transfer, restructure and testing, provide a scientific way for translators to dig out both the referential and connotative meaning of the words and the grammatical relations, to make semantic and structural adjustments in transfer, and to build in redundancy in restructure and testing. And by comparing different versions of the poem *Lu Zhai*, we can find that this translation procedure is helpful for poetry translation. It’s important to note that those four steps are the basis of achieving the functional equivalence between the receptors and the original readers. The following part will focus on Kenneth Rexroth’s version to discuss the functional equivalence of beauty in poetry translation.

2.1.2 The functional equivalence of beauty

Nida's definition of functional equivalence is that "translating consists in producing in the receptor language the closest natural equivalent of the source language message, first in terms of meaning and secondly in terms of style" (Nida 1986: 12). Here "equivalent" points toward the source text; "natural" focuses on the target language; "closest" binds the two orientations together on the basis of the highest degree of appropriation. The theory puts both the source and target text into consideration and emphasizes on producing the similar reader's response. When it comes to the poetry translation, functional equivalence should also be achieved in terms of meaning and style.

For poetry translation, the reproduction of beauty in sense should be put in the first place, then the sound and the form, according to Xu Yuanchong (Xu 95). To achieve the functional equivalence of beauty in sense, words that are equivalent to the original text and are favored by westerners at the same time, are recommended for using in translation. To achieve the functional equivalence of beauty in sound, the strengths of western poem should be adopted to compensate for the loss of Chinese during the translation. To achieve the functional equivalence of beauty in form, the length and the antithesis of the poem should also be paid attention to.

The functional equivalence of beauty principle is appropriate for guiding the poetry translation. This is supported by the result that Kenneth Rexroth's translation of *Lu Zhai*, which is admired among English versions. According to the author of *Nineteen Ways of Looking at Wang Wei*, "the poem Wang might have written had he

been born a 20th century American” (Weinberger & Paz 23). Rexroth’s version is as follows:

Deep in the Mountain Wilderness

Deep in the mountain wildness

Where nobody ever comes

Only once in a great while

Something like the sound of a far off voice.

The low rays of the sun

Slip through the dark forest,

And gleam again on the shadowy moss.

Kenneth Rexroth, 1970

To translate Chinese ontological aporia, which is “someone’s voice in the empty mountain”, Rexroth used four lines to reproduce the beauty of sense in poetry. By using “comes” rather than “goes” in the second line, he has created an implicit “narrator-observer” without using the first person (Weinberger & Paz 23). Here “narrator-observer” means that the poet was in the mountain while being invisible because he had been melted with the nature. And the third line “once in a great while”, despite of an ordinary phrase, invites us to the mountain and hear the sound, bridging the gap between readers and the poem, thus reproducing the beauty of sense by arousing the resonance. After the fifth line, Rexroth used “low rays” to indicate the afternoon and the verb “slip” instead of “enter” in the sixth line is “reminiscent of Sanskrit forest trysts”, which vividly sketches a picture of rays penetrating the leaves in a gentle way (Weinberger & Paz 23). In the last line, “shadowy moss” instead of the literal meaning “green moss” added a deep meaning to the poem by showing the contrast between the lightness and the darkness. Although the reproduction of the beauty in sound and form is not obvious in Rexroth’s translation, he had delivered the

spirit of the poem to western readers in an appropriate way, thus realizing the functional equivalence of beauty among readers.

In conclusion, Nida's functional equivalence theory is applicable to poetry translation. For one thing, it provides a scientific approach to achieve a high degree of equivalence of response, firstly the analysis of both the referential and connotative meaning of words and the grammatical relations, secondly the transfer of the message by making semantic and structural adjustments, thirdly the restructuring such as building in explanation to help receptors understand, and lastly the testing through scientific methods. For another thing, Nida's functional equivalence theory is consistent with the principle of reproducing the beauty in poetry. Translators can deliver the spirit of the original text in a way favoured by receptors, thus achieving the functional equivalence of beauty. However, Nida's functional equivalence also had disadvantages when it is applied to poetry translation, for example, ignorance of cultural difference and simplification of the original meaning.

2.2 The cons of applying Nida's functional equivalence to poetry translation

Nida's functional equivalence puts the emphasis on "producing in the receptor language the closest natural equivalent of the source language message, first in terms of meaning and secondly in terms of style" (Nida 1986: 12). This means that the goal of functional equivalence is to achieve the similar reader's response. And if there is a conflict between form and message, the latter one should be given full priority in

translation. But this definition indicates two questions. For one thing, too much focuses on the equivalence will lead to the ignorance of different cultures, especially the omission of culture-loaded words and foreign customs so as to make the translated work consistent with the mainstream culture.

For another thing, poetry as a literary text usually melts its deep philosophical meaning into simple words and form, so it's hard for translators to find a closest natural equivalent of the original text. Instead, they may simplify or ignore the authentic culture so as to deliver the message in a way they understand and realize the communication effect. Besides, both form and meaning are important for poetry, especially in some occasion where form is the carrier of the meaning. So it's not always appropriate to apply Nida's functional equivalence to poetry translation.

Other disadvantages of Nida's functional equivalence include its own limitation in literary text, and the difficulty in evaluating the reader's response, which can never be identical to the original reader, for the cultural and historical settings are too different. Based on the translation of *Lu Zhai*, the following part will give a detailed analysis of the two disadvantages — the ignorance of cultural difference and the simplification of the original meaning.

2.2.1 Ignorance of cultural difference

To achieve the functional equivalence in translation, translators will focus on transferring the message of the source text to the target reader in a way suitable for understanding. This will lead to the ignorance of cultural difference. Susan Bassnett

developed Nida's functional equivalence theory and put forward that the equivalence should be realized in a cultural context. Since translation is not conducted in a vacuum, it will be manipulated by ideology, poetics and patronage, according to Bassnett and Lefevere in *Translation, Rewriting and the Manipulation*. They proposed that "translation is a rewriting of an original text". As a result, the translator's role is highly emphasized and their translation strategies should be devoted to obliterating the antithesis between the source text and the target text.

However, the ignorance of cultural difference leads to the inequality between the original and the host culture, thus the equivalence and manipulation theory end up as a tool for cultural colonization. It can be found in the translation of Wang Wei's *Lu Zhai*. In C. J. Chen and Michael Bullock's version. They translated the former two lines as "*On the lonely mountain/ I meet no one,/ I hear only the echo/ of human voices*" (Weinberger & Paz 18). Firstly, the first-person narrator shows the translators' wrong understanding of Wang Wei's "人", who refers to anyone, or no one in Chinese culture, rather than "I". The reason of the translators' "manipulation" is that in western people's mind, "Man is the measure of all things", and the subjectivity of humans is highly advocated. So they translated "人" into "I" according to their understanding, while failed to transfer the real spirit. Secondly, Wang Wei's "空山" was translated into "lonely mountain". The translators mistakenly believed that "empty" was equal to "lonely", which is "surely western conceit" (Weinberger & Paz 17).

Another example is Chang Yin-nan & Lewis C. Walmsley's version. They

reversed the couplets and translated “但闻人语响” into “*Yet faint voices drift on the air*”, “复照青苔上” into “*Casts motley patterns on the jade-green mosses*”. The translators added adjectives such as “faint”, “motley”, and “jade-green” to draw a vivid picture but they exerted too much of their own intention in the poem. According to Eliot Weinberger and Octavio Paz, “it is a classic example of the translator attempting to ‘improve’ the original and the product of translators’ unspoken contempt for the original poet” (Weinberger & Paz 17).

From those two examples, it can be found that when the translators tried to deliver the closest natural equivalent of the source language to the receptors, they will make adjustments or to be more specific, manipulate in order to make the translation accepted by the target readers. In such a way, the cultural difference was ignored and the inequality emerged as western cultural colonization.

2.2.2 Simplification of the original meaning

Except the ignorance of cultural difference, another disadvantage of Nida’s functional equivalence theory in poetry translation is that the original meaning can be simplified because for one thing, the equivalent is difficult to be found. Nida’s functional equivalence theory is relatively easier to be achieved in translation among European countries or on informative texts. Since European languages are generally close to each other for they are originated from the same linguistic system. And as for informative texts, the equivalent of words or expressions can be found in a corpus. But when it comes to Chinese-English translation or even translation of literary text,

the challenges would be much greater. So it's difficult to achieve functional equivalence in poetry translation.

For another thing, the philosophy hidden in simple words is usually hard for foreigners to understand while translators need to transmit the message of a poem, which should be acceptable to receptors. As a result, the original meaning of poems will be simplified. Wang Wei's poem is famous for "entering poetry through Chan" (Stepien 213). "Chan" is developed from Buddhism, which advocates people to "pass beyond inherently self-referential evaluative conceptualizations and become completely 'without thought and without concept' (无思无念)" (Stepien 214). In Wang Wei's *Lu Zhai*, though the Buddhist notionality was not expressed, he rather let things open into their emptiness, by thus bridging the gap between man and nature.

Why there are human voices in the empty mountain? This paradox indicates Buddhism emptiness, which is "a notion arising from the Buddha's observation that there is no inherent, unchanging, independent self underlying the ceaseless flow of interdependent phenomena" (Stepien 209). It means that nothing is ultimately autonomous, and all things are caused. So man is "neither being nor not-being" (非有非无), unified with nature to a fluid state wherein "both self and things are forgotten" (Stepien 229). That's why human voice can be heard even the mountain is empty. It is not important whether there is a man or not, or the mountain is real or not. The goal of Wang Wei's depicting this emptiness is to invite us to walk into the picture, "free from preconceptions and inclinations, so as to be able to follow phenomena wherever they may lead" (Stepien 222).

The poem *Lu Zhai* reflects the non-duality of form and emptiness(色空不二) of Buddhism, which refers to the dependence and unification between “Spirit and Matter, Creator and the Created, Human and non-Human” (Martin 63). However, in western world, it is dualism that holds the dominant position, and the mundane and transcendental realms are distinct from each other. According to them, nature and humans are alien to each other. Their attitude toward nature oscillated between the two extremes of “human domination” or of “human inadequacy” (Martin 64). The reason can be related to geography, since there are many isolated islands in mediterranean area influenced periodically by bad weather, so it’s hard for them to establish a close relationship with nature.

As a result, “empty mountain” was translated into “lonely mountain”. It was because western translators distinguished nature with humans and forcefully added human emotion into nature since “man is the measure of everything”. Similar examples can be found in the adding of “I” as the origination of human voices in the second line, as well as more adjectives to describe “sunlight” and “moss” in the third and fourth line. However, the original spirit of “Emptiness” was not transmitted. Even though the simplified message may be much more accepted by western readers, the equivalence of spirit is not achieved actually.

In conclusion, Nida’s functional equivalence will lead translators to ignore the difference of authentic cultures, and simplify the original meaning. These are the disadvantages of applying the theory to poetry translation.

Chapter 3 Conclusion

Based on the notion that poetry is translatable, this paper analyzes the pros and cons of applying Nida's functional equivalence theory to the translation of *Lu Zhai*, written by a famous Chinese poet Wang Wei in the Tang Dynasty. *Lu Zhai* is a typical Chinese landscape poem, reflecting the spirit of Buddhism emptiness by presenting a paradox that human voices can be heard in the empty mountain. Since the 20th century, this poem has been translated into other languages. In 1987, a book titled *Nineteen Ways of Looking at Wang Wei* written by Eliot Weinberger and Octavio Paz was published, showing different versions of *Lu Zhai* with a brief analysis. Because poetry translation requires translators to transmit both the meaning and beauty of the original poem to the target readers so that the latter would feel the same sympathy as the original readers with the poet. This requirement is consistent with Nida's functional equivalence, which means that "translating consists in producing in the receptor language the closest natural equivalent of the source language message, first in terms of meaning and secondly in terms of style" (Nida 1986: 12). In this definition, the receptor's response is highly emphasized to the creation of the maximum similar response among receptors compared with the original readers.

But there are still limitations of Nida's functional equivalence theory. Based on the different versions of *Lu Zhai*, this paper has analyzed the pros and cons of this theory when it is applied to poetry translation. The paper is divided into three chapters. Chapter One is the introduction of the research goal and significance, as well as the

poet Wang Wei and his poem. Chapter Two shows a detailed analysis of the pros and cons of applying Nida's functional equivalence theory to poetry translation. On the one hand, the theory has a positive role in guiding the translation for it provides a scientific procedure for translation and focuses on the similar reader's response, the result of which is to achieve the functional equivalence of beauty. On the other hand, the theory has limitations. Except the difficulty of evaluating readers' response, other disadvantages include the ignorance of cultural difference, indicating the potential of western cultural colonization; and the simplification of the original meaning, such as Buddhism emptiness. Chapter Three is the conclusion of this paper, which summarizes the relation between translation theories and practice.

In conclusion, Nida's functional equivalence theory has both pros and cons when it is applied to poetry translation. But this does not justify that poetry is untranslatable. Instead, only through translation can poetry keep alive and through interaction, can translation theories improve themselves too. For one thing, translation promotes cultural communication. Although the functional equivalence theory has limitations in ignoring the cultural differences, and simplifying the original meaning, the western receptors have the chance to learn about foreign cultures even from a relatively narrow lens. Their understanding will be richer and more inclusive as more and more translated texts are introduced into their countries. As a result, cultural colonization can be eliminated and cultures from different countries will be respected.

For another thing, translation theories are developing themselves through communication. Nida's functional equivalence theory puts emphasis on receptors. But

this may ignore the authenticity of the original culture because of the aim to achieve the similar response among receptors. Realizing the shortcomings of Nida's theory, other scholars put forward their translation theories from psychological, social, and ecological perspective, etc. The later scholars pay more attention to realizing the balance between author, text and reader with the inner and outer factors considered. Those theories are still improved during the practice of translation and communication.

Theories and practice are two sides of a coin, depending on each other. This paper explores the pros and cons of applying Nida's functional equivalence to poetry translation based on the study of translated versions of Wang Wei's *Lu Zhai*, hoping to bring some inspiration to the translation studies.

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