

# A Comparative Research on the English Translation of “The Book of Poetry - Caiwei” from the Perspective of Three-Dimensional Transformation in Eco-translatology – Taking the Translations of Xu Yuanchong and Wang Fanglu as an Example

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**Abstract:** *As the earliest collection of poetry in China, Shijing is not only the cultural canon of the Chinese nation, but also a valuable heritage of world culture. The poem “Caiwei” in “Shijing-Xiaoya” can be regarded as the opening poem of the ancient war, which depicts the sufferings of the war, and also writes about the inexhaustible family and national sentiments. This paper selects the translations of Mr Xu Yuanchong and Mr Wang Fanglu, and based on the three-dimensional transformation theory of Eco-translatology, compares the adaptive transformation of both of them in Linguistic dimension, cultural dimension, and communicative dimension, and appreciates the translations’ embodiment of the original context and its embedded Chinese culture, and explores the translation strategies of ancient poems.*

**Keywords:** Eco-translatology studies; Poetry Classic - Caiwei; Three-dimensional transformation; Comparative study.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The Book of Poetry (Shijing) is the first collection of poems in China, which collects poems from the beginning of the Western Zhou Dynasty to the middle of the Spring and Autumn Period, spanning up and down for about five or six hundred years, with a total of 311 poems, reflecting the various styles of social life in the Zhou Dynasty. Confucius once commented on the Book of Poetry as follows: “Poetry 300, in a nutshell. It is said: Si Wu Yi”. He praised the sincerity of its poetic sentiment. Its content reflects social reality and expresses true feelings, which is the first milestone of Chinese realism literature and lays the foundation of Chinese traditional poetry civilisation. Since the 19th century, Chinese culture has been spreading rapidly abroad, and the Book of Poetry has been translated into many languages, with dozens of English translations alone. According to the different backgrounds of the times, translators have adopted various means of translation to produce versions with different characteristics for different audiences. In this paper, we select “Caiwei” from “Xiao Ya” of the Classic of Poetry and take the translations of Mr Xu Yuanchong and Mr Wang Fanglu as examples to compare their adaptive transformations in the linguistic, cultural and communicative dimensions, and to explore the guiding significance of the three-dimensional transformation theory of eco-translation for the translation of ancient poems, in the hope of contributing to the translation practice and research of the relevant texts.

## 2. THEORETICAL BASIS

### 2.1 A Brief Introduction to Eco-translatology

Eco-translatology is proposed by Professor Hu Gengshen, aiming to achieve the harmony and balance of the translation ecosystem through adaptation and selection in the translation process. Based on the philosophical justification of “adaptation/selection” in Darwin’s theory of biological evolution, and through dialectical absorption, Professor Hu defined translation as “the translator’s selection activity to adapt to the translation ecological environment” (Hu, 2004: 16). The translation ecological environment refers to “the world consisting of the original text, the original language and the translated language, i.e. the interconnected and interactive whole of language, communication, culture, society, as well as the author, the reader, and the delegator” (Hu Gengshen,

2011: 7), and the translation ecological environment is not only a collection of factors that constrains the translator's optimum adaption and optimal choice, but also a place for the translator's The ecological environment of translation is not only a collection of factors constraining the translator's optimal adaptation and optimal choice, but also the premise and basis for the translator's multi-dimensional adaptation and adaptive choice (Hu Gengshen, 2004). The process of generating translations can be roughly divided into two stages: the "natural" selection of translators and the "natural" selection of translations. The "nature" here refers to the "translation ecosystem", while the "translation ecosystem" refers to the world presented by the original text, the original language and the translated language, i.e. language, communication, culture, society, as well as the author, the reader, and the translator. The "translation ecological environment" refers to the world presented by the original language, the original language and the translated language, i.e. language, communication, culture, society, and the interconnected and interactive whole of the author, the reader and the client. Therefore, when translators carry out translation activities, as an integral part of the whole, they are subject to the constraints and influences of the translation ecology in which they live, and thus make adaptive choices of the translation methods they adopt. The theory focuses on guiding translation activities with philosophical foundations such as system theory and synergy theory, so as to achieve the harmonious coexistence of all parts of the translation ecosystem, which is no longer confined to static translation standards and goes beyond the traditional static view of translation.

## **2.2 Translator-centred Theory**

Translation is the adaptation and selection of translators (Hu Gengshen, 2004) is one of the basic core views of Eco-translatology, and such a view of translation reflects the translator-centred view of Eco-translatology. The concept of "translator-centredness" is explored from several different perspectives, such as the "triad" relationship, the relationship of the "persons", the function of the translator, the differences in translation, the construction of meaning, the choice of adaptation, and the practice of translation, in order to establish the concept of translator-centredness and to promote the concept of translator-centredness. The concept of "translator-centred" is explored from several different perspectives, such as translator function, translation differences, meaning construction, adaptation selection, translation practice, etc. In order to establish the core position of translator-centred translation in the theory of translation adaptation selection, the translator's subjective initiative in translation activities is greatly emphasized. In eco-translation, the degree of translator-centredness is relative, and the translator not only chooses and dominates, but also adapts and obeys (Eco-translation). "In the Eco-translatology, the degree of translator-centredness is relative, and the translator not only chooses and dominates, but also adapts and obeys (Hu Gengshen, 2004: 99-100). Therefore, when analysing the choices made by the two translators in this paper, we will analyse them in the context of their Eco-translatology environment. Therefore, when analysing the choice of the two translators in this paper, we will take into account the translation ecological environment they are in.

## **2.3 Three-dimensional Translation Theory**

Under the theme concept of "Translation is Adaptation and Choice", the theory of Eco-translatology clearly embodies the translator-centred concept in the definition of translation - translation is "the translator's choice activity to adapt to the translation ecological environment". "The theory also specifies that translation is a choice activity of the translator to adapt to the ecological environment of translation. At the same time, the theory also specifies the interpretation of translation ontology by the theory of translation adaptation and selection: (1) the translation process - the alternating cycle of translator adaptation and translator selection; (2) the translation principle - multi-dimensional selective adaptation and adaptive selection; (3) the translation method - the "three-dimensional" translation method; and (4) the translator-centred concept - translation is a "translator's selection activity to adapt to the translation ecosystem". Translation method - "three-dimensional" (linguistic, communicative and cultural transformation); (4) Translation evaluation criteria - the degree of multi-dimensional transformation, reader's feedback and translator's quality, which leads to the conclusion that the best translation is "integrated adaptation". The best translation is the one with the highest degree of "integration and adaptive selection" (Hu Gengshen, 2009: 48).

This paper compares the translation strategies of Mr Xu Yuanchong with those of Mr Wang Fanglu, and therefore chooses the three-dimensional transformation theory, which is the theory of Eco-translatology in translation method.

### 3. COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE TWO TRANSLATIONS OF THE CLASSIC OF POETRY - CAIWEI

#### 3.1 Linguistic Dimension

Linguistic dimension is the translator's adaptive selection of linguistic forms in the translation process. The translator's adaptive selection of linguistic dimension (i.e. linguistic form) is carried out in different aspects and at different levels, such as linguistic form and rhetorical style. According to Koo Jung-kun (1998: 225), "Poetry is poetry because of its musicality, and the expression of that musicality mostly depends on metre, so if the translated poems can excel in metre, and accompany the original poems in their mood, it is like the icing on the cake, so what is wrong with that? It may be said that the metre is too restrictive. Of course, it is too restrictive. The master craftsman must have rules to carry out his work, and his skill is often not outside of the rules and regulations. Only those who are able to comply with the law, but are also able to travel with ease, and do not go beyond the limits of what they want to do, can truly be called a great man." Because "Caiwei" was originally composed for chanting, the original text has a strong sense of musicality and structural beauty, so all translations should pursue the beauty of rhyme and rhythm as well as a unique and exquisite structure.

The original text of "Caiwei" is a quatrain poem, which uses a lot of superimposed characters, double sounds and superimposed rhymes to imitate sounds, symptoms, feelings and manners, thus enhancing the musicality and sense of rhythm of the language. In terms of rhyming, it adopts intervallic rhymes and interactive rhymes, which are harmonious and vivid to the ear. The author extracts the last two lines of the original text and analyses the two translations from the language dimension.

原文	许译文	王译文
行道迟迟,	Long, long the way; Hard, hard the day.	And I walk slowly due to being tired,
载饥载渴。	Hunger and thirst, Press me the worst.	I'm very thirsty and feeling very hungry.
我心伤悲,	My grief overflows,	And I'm sad although I'm home now,
莫知我哀。	Who knows? Who knows?	Nobody knows my sadness' mystery.

In *The Art of Translation*, Mr Xu Yuanchong points out that poems should be rhythmic, rhyming, smooth and pleasant to listen to, which is the sound beauty of poems (2006: 76), and in terms of copying the musical beauty of the original quatrains, Mr Xu's translation can be considered as subtle. Each line in Xu's translation consists of four syllables, and since English is a syllable-timed language and Chinese is word-timed, the syllables are better able to reproduce the rhythm of the original than the words. Not only that, Xu's translation is also as close as possible to the original text in terms of the rhythms within and between sentences. For example, Xu Yuanchong translates the original post-stacked word "迟迟" into the pre-stacked word "long, long", and translates the phrase "载" into the pre-stacked word "long, long". ..... into "first" and "worst", which is similar to the original poem. "and the original poem corresponds to the beautiful melody, long melody, but also highlights the hardships of the soldier's homecoming, rendering the atmosphere of the bleak and sad, greatly enhancing the infectious force of lyricism. At the end of the poem, "Who knows? Who knows?" adopts a superimposed sentence, translating the negative sentence of the original text into a question sentence, which strengthens the poet's infinite sadness in one song and three sighs, leaving readers with infinite reverie and thoughts.

In terms of fidelity, Mr Wang Fanglu chose to be more faithful to the original text in terms of structure. While Xu's translation sacrifices some structural consistency in order to restore the beauty of the music, Mr Wang Fanglu's translation ensures neatness, harmony and faithfulness without adding or deleting lines. In terms of rhyming, Mr Wang Fanglu chose the common rhymes used in the original text, such as "hungry" and "mysterious", and "very firsty" and "very hungry" not only rhyme internally, but also copy the rhythm of the original by repeating phrases. Such a choice not only reflects the translator's treasure and respect for the original text, but also helps to disseminate the excellent Chinese literature in its original flavour.

#### 3.2 Communicative Dimension

The communicative dimension of adaptive selection of translation means that the translator pays attention to the adaptive selection of bilingual communicative intent in the translation process. In addition to the conversion of

linguistic information and cultural connotations, the translator focuses on the communicative dimension, paying attention to whether the communicative intention of the original text is reflected in the translated text.

When translators make choices in this dimension, they need to reconcile the two ends of adaptation - to keep the original flavour or to adapt to the habits of Western readers. Caiwei belongs to the category of Xiaoya, a musical song used for aristocratic banquets, while today's translations should not ignore one of the audiences, the general public, and the readers of the English translation may have a Western cultural background, the translator needs to take into account the effect of the conveyance of cultural connotations. The comparison between the original text and the translation is as follows:

原文	许译文	王译文
昔我往矣，	When I left here,	When I recall the time we march out,
杨柳依依。	Willows shed tear.	Willows billow in wind passionate.
今我来思，	I come back now,	Today I come back with no armors,
雨雪霏霏。	Snow bends the bough.	Snowflakes fly falling on my clothes.

In terms of maintaining the national style and characteristics of the original work, Mr Xu Yuanchong's translation of Caiwei provides us with a successful example. Xu's translation is in poetic style, which recreates as much as possible the original flavour and artistic style of the original work, and reflects the beauty of neat form and balanced and symmetrical structure just like the original work. In addition, in terms of the amount of information, Xu's translation chooses to present the same information as the original text, which maintains the characteristic of Chinese subtlety and euphemism, but inevitably creates comprehension difficulties for readers of different cultural backgrounds, and consistently results in the situation that they know the meaning of the words but not the depth of their meaning.

Compared with Mr Xu Yuanchong, Mr Wang Fanglu's translation is inclined to prose style. This kind of prose connection has to a certain extent dissolved the structural characteristics of the original poem, but it is more suitable for the logical thinking and aesthetic habits of Western readers. In addition, Mr Wang Fanglu adopts the translation strategy of augmentation to add some information that is not explicitly stated in the original text, such as "When I recall the time", which indicates that this is the protagonist's recollection of the past and reduces ambiguity. As for the translation of "to", Xu chooses "left" and Wang chooses "march out", which means march in English, and the latter is more explicit, so that readers can better understand the meaning of the word. The latter is clearer and more understandable to readers.

### 3.3 Cultural Dimension

Adaptive selection of cultural dimension means that the translator pays attention to the transmission and interpretation of bilingual cultural connotations in the translation process. This kind of adaptive selection of cultural dimension is to pay attention to the differences between the original language culture and the translated culture in terms of nature and content, to avoid misinterpretation of the original text from the cultural point of view of the translated language, and to pay attention to adapting to the whole cultural system to which the language belongs while translating from the original language.

Over the past thousand years, the Chinese nation has formed a large number of images with unique cultural connotations, which are the common memories of the nation and carry Chinese cultural genes, and such images are huge in number and ubiquitous in the Book of Songs. For example, "Wei" in "Cai Wei". Wei was especially loved by Chinese literati. Apart from "Poetry Classic - Caiwei", there are other poems such as Su Dongpo's "Yuanxiu Vegetables", Lu You's "Nesting Vegetables Poem", and Mr Lu Xun's "Caiwei" novels, etc. The so-called "Wei" of the ancients is actually the same as the present-day "Wei". The so-called "Wei" of the ancients is in fact the wild pea and the large nesting vegetable of today, and in fact, although some of the verses of "Caiwei" are very popular in China, only a very small number of people really know the real appearance and the scientific name of the so-called "Wei", which is not only a plant but often used as the name of a plant to the Chinese. For the Chinese, "Wei" has become not only a plant, but also a symbol and a cultural symbol. In "Caiwei", the ancients observed the passage of time through the growth pattern of "Wei" - "from the spring equinox, to Qingming, to Guyu, the chronological sequence of the poem is well organised, and the poetic meaning is coherent" (Chongchen Zhang, "The Spring Equinox", "The Spring Equinox", "The Spring Equinox", "The Spring Equinox" and "The Valley Rain"). "(Zhang Chongchen, 2002: 63).

Mr Xu Yuanchong translates “薇” as “fern”, a generic term for ferns, while Mr Wang Fanglu translates it as “bean seedlings”, meaning “bean seedlings”. Mr Wang Fanglu translated it as “bean seedlings”, meaning “bean seedlings”. The former choice of the word “fern” expands the connotation of the word “wei”, which is more in line with the Chinese perception of the word as a cultural symbol rather than a specific plant, while the latter choice of the direct translation is faithful to the original text in terms of the literal meaning of the word, but may cause difficulties for Western readers in understanding the meaning of the word “fern”, such as: why does this warrior want to pick bean seedlings? Why is the soldier picking beanstalks? Why does the whole text talk about “beanstalks”?

However, the author believes that the translator should have the courage to leave some distance between the original text and the readers. Nowadays, the so-called cultural exchanges between the East and the West are more of “flow” (one-way flow of strong cultures) and less of “communication” (mutual interaction between strong and weak cultures). English-speaking cultures, especially the American culture, have been travelling the world under the support of their strong economic and military power (Guo Xuming, 2011: 73). Therefore, the author believes that the appropriate choice of translation strategies of alienation allows readers to “get up close” to the source language and culture and “accept the linguistic and cultural differences of the foreign text” (Venuti, 1995: 20) rather than accepting the Western discourse. It is more conducive to the “going out” of Chinese culture, and is also a manifestation of cultural self-confidence.

#### 4. Conclusion

Classical Chinese poetry is a vast ocean, reflecting the great achievements of classical Chinese literature, glittering with the wisdom of ancient sages in understanding the world, and displaying the rich and colourful artistic sentiments of the ancients. Based on the three-dimensional transformation theory of Eco-translatology, this paper compares and analyses the English translations of the classic poem *Caiwei* by Mr. Xu Yuanchong and Mr. Wang Fanglu. In the choice of adaptation to each dimension, the two translators have their own preferences, such as Mr. Xu Yuanchong’s flexible handling of the structure of the translation in order to pursue the reproduction of the original’s beauty of phonetics and rhythms, and Mr. Wang Fanglu’s promotion of the transmission of the meaning of the poem by means of the strategy of augmentation while guaranteeing the structural fidelity of the original text. Mr Wang Fanglu, on the basis of ensuring the structural faithfulness of the original text, promotes the communication of the meaning of the poem through such strategies as adding translation. In addition, it can be seen from the analysis that the theory of “three-dimensional transformation” has certain guiding significance in the translation of classical poems, which requires the translator to pay attention to the transmission and transformation of information in the three dimensions of language, culture and communication, to reproduce the love and beauty of the poems, and to resonate with the readers’ emotions, so as to promote the dissemination of the excellent traditional Chinese culture.

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