

Retaining Truth, Seeking Goodness and Preserving Beauty: Principles of Translating Tsangyang Gyatso's Poems Into English

YU Yang, LI Zheng-shuan

Hebei Normal University, Shijiazhuang 050024, China

Tsangyang Gyatso's poems were widely circulated and still enjoy popularity. He was an influential living Buddha (Renpoche) in Tibetan Buddhism and a talented and legendary historical figure. Nowadays, more and more scholars, poets and translators have devoted to the study of his works. Here we will focus on discussing the English translation of his poems and their value. We analyze texts of the *Tsangyang Gyatso's Poems (Chinese-English)* and seek to further study the translation principles such as "retaining truth, seeking goodness and preserving beauty". By doing this, we strive to improve the quality of translation, give consideration to the construction of the four elements such as poetic meaning, emotion, tone and intention, to enable the reader to achieve the senses and the acquisition of images, to provide more perfect translation in the "Tsangyang Gyatso Vogue", to promote the dissemination and sharing of Tibetan culture and to inject new vitality.

Keywords: Tsangyang Gyatso's poetry, translation; principles

Introduction

In *Studies on the Art of Chinese Poetry*, Yuan Xingpei, a famous scholar and critic from Peking University, put forward the concepts of "direct meaning" and "implicative meaning" to explain the ambiguity or polysemy of Chinese and to announce that Chinese classical poetry mostly focused on implicative meaning. However, through a comparison between Chinese poetry and Western poetry, poetry theory and translation theory, we find that English poetry expresses the meaning directly. In the view of Xu Yuanchong, Chinese poetry attaches importance to taking advantage of a scene to express one's emotion, while English poetry often expresses the poet's own feelings directly. In addition, the differences between Chinese culture and Western culture can also be seen in translation theory. Chinese translators emphasize translating the general meaning to demonstrate the poetic art and pursue beauty of oriental culture, while Western translators lay more emphasis on literal translation to re-present the modern scientific spirit and the spirit of seeking truth. Therefore, in the course of translation practice, we can see that Chinese and English cannot be completely equal. Even if one tries to attain a forced equivalence, it is not necessarily equivalent. And translation of a nation's classics has a double barrier, and even can be regarded as the threefold imitation of the original author's meaning: The imitation of the

YU Yang, undergraduate, School of Resources and Environmental Sciences, Hebei Normal University. Research interest: geographical translation studies.

LI Zheng-shuan, Ph.D., Professor, School of Foreign Languages, Hebei Normal University. Research interest: British and American poetry, translation and criticism.

original idea in the Tibetan language, the Chinese version's imitation of the Tibetan version and the translation of the English version is an imitation of the Chinese version. Therefore, in the process of translation, we should choose the appropriate expression, both shape (form) and spirit, to retain truth, seek goodness and preserve beauty. The principle of "retaining truth, seeking goodness and preserving beauty" which we are going to elaborate here is not the same as the principle of "faithfulness, expressiveness and elegance" put forward by Yan Fu in the early twentieth Century. Yan Fu, borrowing from the Chinese traditional literary theory and the mode of writing and thinking, emphasizes that objective and complete translation is faithfulness; fluency and appropriateness is expressiveness; elegance means symmetry, unity and similarity in form and spirit. The principle "retaining truth, seeking goodness and preserving beauty" is a theoretical summary of previous scholars' translation practice. We think that natural and idiomatic translation is truth, faithful equivalence is goodness, vivid and artistic form and sense is beauty. In this way, we can both achieve the combination of the original meaning, emotion, intonation and intention, and can present the translation as an independent work.

The Principle of "Retaining Truth" in Translation

"Being natural is the soul of translation" (王宏印, 2005, p. 30). As far as poetry translation is concerned, "truth" means being natural, which is the premise of translation. Being natural means to use the proper words, structure, rhetoric, rhyme conversion, authentic, idiomatic, comprehensible and familiar language to convey thought and arouse feeling on the condition that the translator understands the essence and connotation of the poem being translated. Therefore, the principle of being natural refers to conveying the content from the source text in authentic, idiomatic and vernacular language. It is reader-oriented, taking the strategy of imitating the source language and arousing the resonance in the target language. In terms of strategy, this tends to be naturalized and domesticated. In terms of skills, it belongs to free translation. In *Tsangyang Gyatso's Poems (Chinese-English)*, this principle is most reflected in the translation of some Tibetan words, nouns and sentences with strong ethnic connotations. Take the eighteenth poem for example:

洁净的水晶山上的雪水，
铃荡子上的露水，
加上甘露药的醇'所酿成的美酒”，
智慧天女当垆。
若用圣洁的誓约去喝，
即可不遭灾难。（李正栓，2015，p. 40）

The English translation is as follows:

The snow water from the clean Crystal Mountain,
The dew on the root of a straight ladybell,
Plus the manna-turned mellow wine,
The yaksha with wisdom acts as the barmaid.
If one drinks them with a saintly vow,
He can avoid any calamity. (LI, 2015, p. 41)

This poem is full of ethnic and regional characteristics, embodying many legends and images of Tibet. The first three lines list the sacred water: snow water, the dew and wine, which make people intoxicated, free of sorrow (李正栓, 2015, p. 40). In the first line, the poet compares the pure snow mountain to the crystal mountain, and the English translator translates the crystal mountain as "Crystal Mountain". "Crystal Mountain"

is a sacred snow mountain in India. Therefore, it naturally gives the reader a sketch of the vast expanse of snow, presenting a sense of holiness and purity. The “铃荡子” in the second line is *klu-bdud-rde-rje* in Tibetan. It is the alias of *Adenophora stricta*, the root of medicinal plant called straight ladybell often found in Sichuan and Tibet. “智慧天女” the Chinese translation in the fourth line is *Ye-shes-mkhah-hgro* in Tibetan. “Ye-shes” means “wisdom”. “Mkhah-hgro-ma” means “female flying in the sky”. Hence “goddess of wisdom” (李正栓, 2015, p. 40). In *Dalai Lama VI's Love Songs: A Collection of Tsangyang Gyatso's Love Poems*, YU Daoquan explained that “the *mkhah-hgro-ma-*” is “*dakini*” when translated into Sanskrit. In sutras written in Chinese, it means an *inuyasha* who can eat the human heart (于道泉, 2011, p. 57). On the basis of referring to the Chinese and Western legend, the English translator chose the word “*Yaksha*” to express *mkhah-hgro-ma-*, which is exactly in line with the characteristics of Tibetan culture, helping readers capture images of the sentence. The detailed and careful handling of the Tibetan vocabularies in this poem makes it easy to understand this poem and cleverly defuses the barrier in constructing the artistic context composed of unfamiliar images. In addition, in other places of this book, we can also see examples of turning the unfamiliar images into natural and authentic images. For example, in the first poem, “未生娘” (a girl who has never given birth to a baby) was translated as “the fair girl”; in the twenty-sixth poem, “当垆女子” (“the female serving at the bar”) was translated as “wine-selling women”; in the twenty-eighth poem, “艺桌拉莱” was translated as “an enchanting fairy”, taking the meaning from a fairy that takes away the heart of people; in the fifty-fourth poem, “法王” was translated as *Yama*, not a king of any sort, and so on. Therefore, it is indispensable to adopt a natural attitude and idiomatic wording, which can greatly help the extension of poetry connotation. Sometimes, some words may be more consistent with the original text, but it reads a little stiff, rough and difficult to understand. Then we must be clear that a flexible conversion is not a desecration of the original works. On the contrary, this conversion is suitable and very crucial. This is not only responsibility a translator has for the readers, but also the expectation of the author for a translator. Just imagine, if the inherent meaning of the source text cannot be obtained, the unique qualities of poetry are more difficult to be found, then how can we talk about the resonance between the reader, and author and translator?

The Principle of “Seeking Goodness” in Translation

J. A. Cuddon wrote in the literary dictionary compiled in 1979: “style is the mode of expression in poetry or prose.” And he pointed out that the analysis and evaluation of the author’s style includes diction, rhetoric, sentence patterns and paragraph structure (邓景茹, 2012, p. 124). Talking about the importance of translation style, LV Shuxing has made a point that “Verse translation, even when the meaning is the same, the style is different”. In 1984, XU Yuanchong expressed a different view in the preface of *One Hundred and Fifty Poems of the Tang Dynasty*, he believed that if the verse translation takes the same meaning from the source text, it must be better to preserve the style of the original poetry than a prose translation and he put forward his concept of translation: “translating poetry into poetry” (张智中, 2005, p. 52). The translation principle put forward by XU Yuanchong had a great influence on later poetry translation and was widely accepted. Therefore, we should know that in translation, we should preserve the style and features of the source text as much as possible, but not to encourage the so-called re-creation only according to the translator’s own wishes and understanding. To a certain extent, in translation, the principle of “seeking goodness” is a restriction to the principle of “retaining truth” described above. That is, although the translator restates the idea of the author, he should still keep to the style of the source text, he should not alter the style of the source text. “The translator cannot exert his

subjective initiative without principle” (李正栓, 2004, p. 36). A real good translator should be “invisible” in his translation, which is to make the reader feel warm and touched when reading the translation, which accords to style of expression of the source text, which causes the reader to get the illusion of reading the source text. Therefore, in translation style, we believe that the emphasis is on loyalty rather than transcendence.

In *Tsangyang Gyatso's Poems (Chinese-English)*, the translator attaches great importance to this principle. Let's take the seventh poem as an example to analyze and explain the truth from the form of faithful equivalence.

The original text is as follows:

花开的时节已过，
“松石蜂儿”并未伤心，
同爱人的因缘尽时，
我也不必伤心。(李正栓, 2015, p. 14)

The translated text is as follows:

When flowers fade after having bloomed,
The bees do not feel sad to depart.
When our love ends as is doomed,
Neither will I have a heavy heart. (LI, 2015, p. 15)

First of all, from the semantic meaning of Chinese translation and English translation, we can learn that, a distinct analogical relationship is formed between Lines 1 and 2 and Lines 3 and 4, or we name it metaphoric structure. By using the relationship between flowers and bees in nature, the poet makes people associate the closeness with the unwillingness to part between lovers. And the English translation uses rhyme scheme of ABAB to suggest correspondence of content. In addition, from the perspective of sentence structure, the corresponding principle is reflected more obviously. At the beginning of the first line and the third line the translator uses the adverb “when” to guide the reader to two concepts, namely “after having bloomed” and “our love ends”, the expressions “flowers fade after...” and “love ends...”, seeming to say that it is quite natural that flowers do bloom and fade as determined by the law of nature. It is true of human beings. The beginning of the poem establishes the tone of helplessness and melancholy. Look at the subject of these two lines “flowers” and “our love” and the verbs “fade” and “ends”. The flowers wither and karma ends. They correspond with each other. It is clear that the sentence structure is the same and the use of words and expression of meaning are also equivalent. Look at the second line and fourth line and you will find that the equivalence is obvious. “The bees” and “I” correspond, comparing the bees to humans. “Feel sad” and “heavy heart” correspond. The bees have no heart but the humans have. Facing the fate that the karma is to end, the poet has to borrow ideas from nature to comfort him besides sighing. It can be said that style of translation and style of the source text are the same. The rhymes are also the same. The style of the source text and the target text are close to each other.

The Principle of “Preserving Beauty” in Translation

Language, the backbone of a text, undertakes the main means of expression of the author's narration. But poetry, as a literary genre expressing emotion and ambition, is composed of highly condensed and extremely artistic language. This artistic language is embodied not only in the appreciation of semantic resonance and poetic lines but also in the vividness of rhyme and imagery.

This is especially true of the choice of language in poetry translation. Similarity in meaning is undeniably important, but similarity in sound and form should not be ignored. XU Yuanchong, when illustrating the theory on beauty in three aspects, thus talks about literary translation, “in literary translation, especially poetry translation, one should convey the beauty in meaning, sound and form as much as possible. So poetry translation is a comprehensive art” (张智中, 2005, p. 52). Then when talking about beauty of recreation, he further pointed out that “literary translation is to convey the beauty of the source text into the beauty of the target text” (张智中, 2005, p. 52). From a close study of Tsangyang Gyatso’s Tibetan version, namely the original woodcut version at Lhasa, from which Yu Daoquan derived his version in 1930, we can find that the original poems were composed with proper arrangement of poetic rhythm, meter and rhyme, repetition and reduplication of words. In terms of rhythm, the poet used the Tibetan folk song style called “legshe”, also called the four and six style, two syllables forming a pause, the rhythm being neat, sonorous and forceful (荣立宇, 2013, p. 44). And the arrangement of syllables is the orderly six syllables. Sometimes it is 6665 or 6565 structure. The 6665 structure is usually used in philosophical poems, with no intention to express powerful feelings. In meter, iambic meters are used, consisting of an unstressed syllable and a stressed syllable, in a neat and rhythmic way to form a strong sense of poetic music, so that people often called Tsangyang Gyatso’s poems “love songs”. In terms of rhyme scheme, the poet’s choice is varied and the English translator uses the approximate alternating English poetic rhyme scheme of ABAB, sometimes using interlaced rhyme scheme of AABA, often using internal rhyme.

In addition, when writing poems, Tsangyang Gyatso focused not only on the beauty of rhyme, but also on expressing the poetic formal beauty through a use of repetition of words including initial reduplication, medial reduplication and terminal reduplication (荣立宇, 2013, p. 46). Therefore, we should pay special attention to this. Take the first poem of Tsangyang Gyatso’s poetry as an example.

The original text is as follows:

Shar phyogs ri bo’i rce nas
 Dkar gsal zla ba shar byung
 Me skyes ya m’i zhal ras
 Yid la’khor’khor byas byung (1930年 木刻版转写)

The English translation is as follows:

From the top of the eastern hill
 The bright moon rises into the sky.
 The cheeks of the fair girl
 Gradually appear in my inward eye. (LI, 2015, p. 3)

In this poem, Tsangyang Gyatso chose the rhyme scheme of ABAB: “nas” in the first line rhyming with “ras” in the third line, “byung” in the second line rhyming with “byung” in the fourth line. The English translator reproduced the rhyme scheme: “hill” rhyming with “girl”, “sky” rhyming with “eye”. In the repetition of the words, the Tibetan “shar” (meaning East) in the first line and the second line and “Byung” (meaning arrival) in the second line and fourth line can be understood as “the moon has arrived at the mountain peaks in the East”, and at the same time, the moon in the east has reached the poet’s heart. And the repetition of the Tibetan word “Khor” (a term intended for wheel-like rotation, here translated freely for continuous use) in the fourth line is used for emphasis and onomatopoeia, to show that “love gradually appeared in the poet’s mind”.

All in all, the principles of translation as “retaining truth, seeking goodness and preserving beauty” lie in the construction of image differences in different cultural contexts, combining the semantic structural features to achieve the reproduction of artistic styles. These three complement each other and restrict each other. However, the components or weight of the three theoretical principles are not equal, nor fixed. Sometimes, the specific circumstances need the translator to make adjustments according to the actual text, for example, when the national characteristics of poetry are quite distinctive, the translator should lay stress on “retaining truth” while the principles of “seeking goodness” and “preserving beauty” should make way to some extent.

Conclusion

In 1930, YU Daoquan published *Tsangyang Gyatso Dalai Lama VI's Love Songs*. This was the first book with Tibetan, Chinese and English. Since then, translations of Tsangyang Gyatso's poems have been published all over the world, mainly in English, French, German, Russian, Italian and other languages.

In recent years, influenced by a television program, a “Tsangyang Gyatso Vogue” has been formed. There also appeared many poems in the name of “Tsangyang Gyatso”, such as “That Day”, the “Poem of Ten Commandments”, “To See or Not to See”, etc. Although this caters to the taste of popular culture to some extent, we think we should be serious and careful in dealing with ethnic culture and maintain a cautious attitude and a clear mind especially when engaged in selection of a source text for translation. Therefore, on the basis of evading pseudo works, the translator should attach great importance to Chinese characteristics and ethnic characteristics to display the essence and beauty of Tibetan culture in translation. In the strategy of international cultural exchange, the translator should assort with the “Top-level Design” (谭成兵, 赵涛, 冯华, 2015, p. 17). As a scholar, the translator should assume the important task of cultural communication. In terms of the strategies, in compliance against cultural aggression, as translators, we should choose with pertinence the reader or audience with power and right to speak to display the essence of our ethnic culture. At the same time, we should take advantage of the “Belt and Road” background, exchange with and learn from countries along the belt and road. We should do our utmost to grasp the rare historic opportunities to enhance the international influence of Tibetan culture, build a better spiritual link between nationalities and countries.

References

- 张智中. (2005). *许渊冲与翻译艺术* [M]. 武汉: 湖北教育出版社.
- 王宏印. (2005). *文学翻译批评论稿* [M]. 上海: 上海外语教育出版社.
- 李正栓. (2015) *仓央嘉措诗集汉英对照* [M]. 长沙: 湖南人民出版社.
- 于道泉. (2011). *六世达赖情歌仓央嘉措情诗集* [M]. 北京: 当代中国出版社.
- 邓景茹. (2012). 诗歌翻译的风格对等 [J]. *大学教育*, (05), 124-126.
- 李正栓. (2004). 忠实对等: 汉诗英译的一条重要原则 [J]. *外语与外语教学*, (08), 36.
- 六世达赖喇嘛仓央嘉措诗选三百年* [M]. (2010). 北京: 中国藏学出版社.
- 荣立宇. (2013). 仓央嘉措诗歌翻译与传播研究 [D]. 南开大学, 44-46.
- 谭成兵, 赵涛, 冯华. (2015). 中国藏族文化国际传播的战略与策略 [J]. *新西部(理论版)*, (21).