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The progress of economy and social development is the driving force of translation research and practice. With the deepening of global development and cooperation, global ecology and green concept has become a topic of concern and is capturing increasing worldwide attention. Under this circumstances, green development has become the key to building global ecological civilization. “Strengthening ecological consciousness and green consciousness, shouldering ecological responsibility” has also become the main theme of the times. In response to this green trend, Green Translation lays stress on the green concept, green behaviour, and the green value in translation practice. The flower images, which take up a large proportion of plant images in Tang poetry, are of high ecological value and significance. This paper takes the Translation of 300 Tang Poems as the research subject, conducts a study on the image rendering of flowers in Tang poetry from the three aspects of Green Translation: language ecology, cultural ecology and communicative ecology.

Keywords: Translation of 300 Tang Poems, image rendering of flowers, Green Translation, green value

Introduction

Green Translation is a newly derived branch from the thought of Ecological Translatology in recent years. It provides a new method in translation practice that focuses on examination and discussion of the green concept and green value of translation practice. The concept holds that translation practice, which contains inherent green concept and green value, tries to explore the green meaning and ecological rationality of the translated text in an active and conscious manner. Compared with “ordinary translation”, Green Translation reflects the position, attitude and pursuit of Ecological Translatology on translation research, and is easier to be carried out in translation process and translation behaviour. In the process of pursuing Green Translation, the translator is committed to reproducing in the target language its innate green meaning and green value as reflected in the original. It advocates the maintaining of a harmonious unity of translation ecology by making
adaptive choices and transformations based on the principle of “multi-dimensional selective adaptation and adaptive selection”, and in view of the “language dimension”, “cultural dimension”, and “communicative dimension” (Hu, 2011, pp. 5-9). In other words, green translation requires translators to respect and adapt to the ecological environment of translation, make conscious green choices in translation practice, and explore the green meaning and value of translation in language, cultural and communicative ecology.

300 Tang Poems is the cream of Tang poetry and also a widely known anthology. It is of typical significance to take its translation as the research object. Since its publication, 300 Tang Poems has become the most widely spread anthology of Tang poems at home and abroad. There are two most influential translations: one is Jade Mountain, which was jointly translated by Witter Bynner and Jiang Kanghu in 1929 (Bynner & Kiang, pp. 618-906), and is also the earliest full translation of the anthology of Tang poems; The other is Translation of 300 Tang Poems (Xu, Lu, & Wu, 1988), which was compiled by Xu Yuanchong and others and published by China Translation & Publishing Corporation in 1988. It is till now the most widely circulated and accepted version in China. This study selects Mr. Xu Yuanchong’s latest translation of 300 Tang poems published in 2007 as the research object to study the image-rendering of flowers in Tang poetry under the guidance of Green Translation.

2. Image Rendering of Flowers in Translation of 300 Tang Poems under the Guidance of Green Translation

“Flower” has been a symbol of beauty since ancient times because of its gorgeous appearance and captivating fragrance. 300 Tang Poems contains lots of flower images, which are not only derived from the creative inspiration of poetry, but also the carriers of the poet’s inner thoughts and feelings. According to statistics, 188 of the 300 Tang poems contain descriptions of plant images, accounting for 63% of all poems. Among them, 72 specific plant images are counted, which appear 342 times in 300 Tang poems. Flower images, including 23 specific types of flowers, can be found in 138 lines of verse, accounting for the highest proportion of all plant images contained in 300 Tang poems.

2.1. Realization of the Green Value of Flower Images in Language Ecology

Language ecology covers all language norms, expression habits and other intralingual factors reflected in the text (Qin, 2019, pp. 61-63). Chinese and English belong to different language systems. The former belongs to Sino-Tibetan language family, while the latter belongs to Indo-European language family. These two completely different language systems are very different in grammar, pronunciation, expression and other related aspects. Poetry is diverse in form and requires a high standard of rhyme and meter. English and Chinese poetry are very different in both rhyme and meter. Therefore, translators are required to play an active role and have a good command of the grammatical norms and prosodic usage of the two languages, and handle the translation of flower images in Tang poetry flexibly, so as to increase the readability of the translation on the basis of being true to the original text.

Example (1) 洛阳女儿惜颜色，坐见落花长叹息。
今年落花颜色改，明年花开复谁在？
Translation: The maiden in the capital loves lovely hue; She would sigh for the flowers falling out of view. Her rosy color fades when flowers fall this year. When flowers blow again, will she pretty appear? (Xu, 2007, p. 345)

This is an ancient Yuefu poem. The whole poem is lyrical and tactful, with seven characters in each line that sounds neat and uniform. The beauty and subtlety of the rhetoric brings the poem into a harmonious melody. In the original poem, “落花” (fallen flowers) in the original is a noun, which is often used in ancient poetry to express the feelings of perishable life and unpredictable fate. The poem describes a woman in Luoyang who is sad to see flowers falling down off the trees, which expresses her sentimental mood that her life is short and her beauty is easy to fade. The translator translated it into an English poem in iambic tetrameter, and translated “落花” (fallen flowers) into two short dynamic sentences “flowers falling out of view” and “when flowers fall”, while retaining the green meaning of “落花”. “Hue, view, year, appear” at the end of each line form the rhyme scheme of AABB, enhances the melodic and rhythmic sense of the translation, achieves the same reading effect as the original, and accentuated the regret and helplessness brought by “fallen flowers”, so that the imagery of “落花” can be vividly reproduced and its green value be well achieved in the target language ecology.

Example (2) 君自故乡来,应知故乡事。来日绮窗前,寒梅著花未?

Translation: You come from native place. What happened there you’d know. Did mume blossoms in face. Of my gauze window blow? (Xu, 2007, p. 139)

This is a five-character essay that expresses the poet’s strong homesickness in an extremely simple tone. The full verses are in antithesis, and the level and oblique tones employed alternate in a musical way. It is not only catchy, but also offers readers more spacious room for imagination. “Plum blossom”, which is always the first flower to bloom in spring, has enjoyed the reputation of “the best of flowers” in China since ancient times for its beautiful appearance, profound meaning, dazzling color as well as sweet smell. The ancients often used “plum blossom” to express their concern and friendship for their friends, or to express their attachment to their hometown and relatives. “寒梅” in the original is literally translated as “mume blossom”, which retains the green meaning of “寒梅” and displays it in the form of iambic tetrameter. “Place, know, face, blow” at the end of each line form the rhyme scheme of ABAB. While retaining the green value and cultural meaning of “寒梅”, the translation reproduces in the target language ecology a sense of rhythm of the original poem, and achieves the same reading effect as of the original text.

Example (3) 秋丛绕舍似陶家,遍绕篱边日渐斜。不是花中偏爱菊,此花开尽更无花。

Translation: Around the cottage like Tao's autumn flowers grow; Along the hedge I stroll until the sun slants low. Not that I favor partially the chrysanthemum. But it is the last flower after which none will bloom. (Xu, 2007, p. 66)

This is a seven-character quatrain in praise of Chrysanthemums. The poem is composed of four lines, each line of which contains seven characters. The full verse is short and concise, and the rhythm is catchy with strict exchanges of level and oblique tones. A sense of joy can be felt between the lines. The translator retains the green value of “菊” by literally rendering it as “Chrysanthemum”, and vividly depicts a picture of a poet who takes a
delight in wandering in the chrysanthemum bushes on an autumn evening, appreciating flowers and chanting poems with no intention of going back home. The translation reproduces the artistic effect of the original poem with the metrical rhythm of iambic heptameter. “Grow, low, chrysanthemum, bloom” at the end of each line reveal the beauty of the rhythm in the original poem through the AABB rhyme scheme, which shows in an original way the reason why the poet loves chrysanthemums, and expresses readers’ admiration for the steadfast character of chrysanthemums that would go through wind and frost before it withers.

2.2. Realization of the Green Value of Flower Images in Cultural Ecology

Cultural ecology can be classified into five categories: ecological culture, material culture, social culture, institutional setting, customs, thoughts and behavior habits (Newmark, 1998, p. 95). Differences in history, geography and other environments have created different cultural environments between the east and west. Therefore, the cultural connotation contained in the same flower may also be very different in different cultural contexts. According to the concept of Green Translation, the translator must fully understand the diverse meanings of different plant images in different cultures when he handles flower images of Tang poetry, and give full play to his initiative under the premise of retaining the green value of the original images, either to supplement the cultural connotation which might be missing in the translation, or to remove redundant cultural content in the target language, in an effort to eliminate cultural barriers in the translation of Tang poetry.

Example (4) 玉容寂寞泪阑干, 梨花一枝春带雨。
Translation: Her jade-white face crisscrossed with tears in lonely world. Like a spray of pear blossoms in spring rain impearled. (Xu, 2007, p. 202)

Pear blossoms (梨花) are beautiful and white. In Chinese culture, they are often related to tears, loneliness and melancholy. If the image of “pear blossom” is deleted directly with only the original meaning retained, the unique charm of “pear blossom” in Chinese culture will be lost. However, keeping only the literal meaning of “pear blossoms” will cause cultural misinterpretation, making it difficult for western readers to understand the poem and might affect the reading effect. By adding the preposition “like”, the translator translates “带雨梨花” (pear blossoms in rain) into “like…of pear blossoms…impearled”, which compares the tears on the jade-white cheeks to impearled pear blossoms, thus not only retaining the green value and cultural image of “pear blossom” in the target cultural ecology, but also improves its readability and offers more room of imagination for target readers.

Example (5) 茨菰叶烂别西湾, 莲子花开犹未还。
Translation: When leaves fell in decay, you left the western bay, But you have not come back now lotus blossoms sway. (Xu, 2007, p. 28)

The Chinese character “莲” (lotus), which shares the similar pronunciation with the character “怜” (love, pity or sympathy), is always associated with love and nostalgia in Chinese culture. The poem starts from the parting between a couple when leaves were rotten late last year to this summer when lotus flowers are in full bloom, expresses the poet’s longing for the one who has not yet come home. The translation kept the green meaning of “莲子花开” and translated it literally as “lotus blossoms sway”. Meanwhile, the transitional word “but” and the subject “you” were added, so that the translation would both in the sense and in the rhythm attain
the original expression effect and artistic value to the greatest extent. Retaining “lotus blossoms” in the cultural ecology of the translation does not seem redundant, but adds to the visual and green feel of the translation.

Example (6) 行人莫上长堤望，风起杨花愁杀人。  
Translation: Don’t gaze afar from the long bank of willows trees! The willow down will grieve your heart when blows the breeze. (Xu, 2007, p. 228)

The willow down is small and light catkin. In Chinese culture, its lightweight has always been described by scholars and poets as a sad symbol of the passing spring since ancient times. Besides, since the Chinese character “柳” (willow) sounds like “留” (to stay), it also represents people’s grief over parting and homesickness, and there can always be felt sadness between the lines. The original “风起杨花愁杀人” depicts a sorrowful scene in which the willow down are floating sorrowfully in the wind. “杨花” is directly translated in the target language as “willow down”, which preserves in the target cultural ecology its green meaning. Meanwhile, the connection between “willow down” and “grieve your heart” increases the bitterness deep inside the poet’s heart, allows the target readers to have a better understanding of the poet’s distress, so as to experience a strong sense of foreign sentiment, thus the green value of “杨花” is embodied in the cultural ecology of the target language.

2.3. Realization of the Green Value of Flower Images in Communicative Ecology

Translation is essentially a cross-cultural communicative activity. The fundamental purpose of translating Tang poetry into English is also to enable readers in the English-speaking world to get the same experience and feelings as Chinese people do, to fully appreciate the charm of Tang poetry and appreciate extensive and profound Chinese culture. Translators are required to fully consider the communicative function of plant images in the translation of Tang poetry, so as to achieve the goal of cross-cultural and cross-language communication.

Example (7) 桐花万里丹山路，雏凤清于老凤声。  
Translation: The flowery mountain path extends for miles long; The young surpass the old in singing phoenix’s song. (Xu, 2007, p. 338)

“梧桐” is a kind of tall arbor tree. Sycamore, plane tree, or paulownia can all be counted as “梧桐” in China. In the poem, “梧桐” refers to paulownia, also called Chinese parasol or phoenix tree, which originates from a Chinese folklore that a phoenix only stays on the phoenix tree at night. “桐花” (paulownia blossoms) are usually purple or white. “桐花万里” (miles of paulownia blossoms) shows a beautiful scenery of paulownia blossoms, in dark or light purple, stretching for miles. In the above translation, miles of “桐花” is rendered as “flowery mountain”. Although it has achieved the same rhythmic beauty as the original, it has lost some of its green value. From the perspective of Green Translation, a translation into “The roadside Paulownia blossoms extend for miles long” instead of “The flowery mountain path extends for miles long” will not only retains the green meaning of “桐花” in the original poem, but also enables western readers to experience different exotic flavor, so as to realize the communicative function of “桐花” in the target language.

Example (8) 皆云入内便承恩，脸似芙蓉胸似玉。  
Translation: Once in the palace, she’d be favored, it was said; Her face was fair as lotus, her bosom like jade. (Xu, 2007, p. 292)
In Chinese, “如花似玉” (like flowers and jade) is often used to describe a woman’s unusual beauty. “芙蓉”, also known as “荷”, “莲” in Chinese, often comes across as a holy, pure and graceful flower in Chinese communicative ecology. The comparison of a woman’s appearance to a lotus flower vividly reveals her unworldly beauty before the readers. However, in western Greek and Roman mythology, lotus represents a fruit that leads to sleepiness and forgetfulness. The translator deliberately preserved the image of “芙蓉” as “lotus” in spite of this communicative dislocation, so that the green meaning of “lotus” can be retained. He also added the phrase “as fair as” to define the verse and guaranteed the reproduction of its communicative meaning in the communicative ecology of the target language.

Example (9) 去年今日此门中，人面桃花相映红。
Translation: In this house on this day last year a pink face vied. In beauty with the pink peach blossom side by side. (Xu, 2007, p. 190)

“桃花” (peach blossom) is always considered as a symbol of beauty, joy, longevity and happiness in Chinese society. Delicate flowers are often compared to beautiful women, and the gorgeous peach blossoms are no exceptions. “人面桃花” (face and peach blossoms) in the original poem describes the scene when the delicate beauty of a girl’s face is matched by the radiance of peach blossoms. The translator did not translate it liberally as “the beautiful girl”, but chose to keep its green meaning and added the word “pink” to define “face” and “peach blossom” respectively, so that the similarity of “face” and “peach blossom” can be vividly brought to readers. Meanwhile, the prepositional phrase “in beauty” is added to the translation, which not only realizes the green value of “peach blossom” in the target communicative ecology, but also increases its communicative function. By doing so, a delicate beauty whose face is as fair as pink peach blossoms appears in reader’s mind, thus a harmonious communicative function is achieved.

3. Conclusion

With the deepening of the concept of ecological civilization in international cooperation and exchange, Green Translation, as a specific form of ecological translation practice, conforms to the requirements of “green development” in the present era. People in China have always been fond of flowers since ancient times, and the “flower world” in Tang poetry expresses the poet’s thoughts and feelings from different aspects. Viewing the image rendering of flowers in Tang poetry from an “ecological perspective”, preserving the green meaning of flower images, and realizing their green value are not only important ways to put Ecological Translatology into practice, but also an effective attempt to spread Chinese ecological culture to the west in the construction of Chinese ecological cultural identity.

References