

A Study on the Translation of Plant Images in Qu Yuan's *Li Sao**

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The renowned masterpiece “*Li Sao*” by Qu Yuan contains numerous plant images for “expressing emotions and aspirations.” Exploring methods of translating plant imagery has greatly assisted in disseminating Chinese classical culture and facilitating cross-cultural communication. This study conducts a comparative analysis of three translations of “*Li Sao*” by Xu Yuanchong, Yang Xianyi, and Hawkes, aiming to understand the different approaches to translating plant imagery and explore variations in translation effectiveness. Through data collection, comparative analysis, and case studies, this research reveals that Xu Yuanchong emphasizes free translation, Yang Xianyi tends towards literal translation, and Hawkes adopts a combination of literal, free, and phonetic translation methods.

Keywords: *Li Sao*, plant imagery, translation strategies

Introduction

Li Sao is the most representative of *Chu Ci* written by Qu Yuan, a famous poet. Among them, the author Qu Yuan used a large number of plant images as metaphors to express his emotions. Familiar images such as vanilla and beauty also represent the author's noble ambition and pursuit. The translation of plant images in classical Chinese poetry holds significant importance in conveying cultural nuances, symbolic meanings, and aesthetic elements inherent in the text. By analyzing various translation approaches employed by different scholars and translators, this study aims to elucidate how the choice of translation method influences the reader's interpretation and appreciation of the poem.

This study summarizes the three translators' different methods of translating plant images and their translation effects. This study aims to answer the following research questions: (1) What translation methods did the three translators mainly use in translating plant images? (2) What translation effects can be achieved by the different translation methods used by the three translators?

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Translation of Plant Images into English

There are more than forty kinds of plants in *Li Sao*. In the process of verification and analysis of these plants, it was found that some of these plants have become untested or gradually annihilated due to time. Therefore, for the study of the translation methods used by translators in these situations, we can see the flexible and accurate translation used by different translators. The translator may use plants of similar families and genera or plants with similar attributes as substitutes, or interpretive translation according to the connotation of the poem, or direct transliteration and annotation. In this paper, more than 20 kinds of plant image translations are selected for comparison, and the different translation methods of the three translators are mainly studied. Therefore, the same or basically consistent translations have been screened out, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1

A Comparative Table of English Translation of Plant Images in Three Versions

Original text	Xu Yuanchong's Translation	Yang Xianyi's Translation	Hawkes' Translation
江离	sweet grass	Angelic herbs	selinea
辟芷	sweet grass	sweet selneas	shady angelica
木兰	grass	magnolia	angelia
蕙茝	sweet orchids	melilotus	blossoms
蕙	clover	melilot	melilotus
杜衡	fragrant grass	azalea	the cart-halting flower
芳芷	fragrant grass	the rumex fragrant and the lichen white	angelica
秋菊	aster	aster petal	chrysanthemum
薜荔	stamens	blue wistaria	valerian
茝	clovers and thymes	melilotus	angelica
芰荷	lotus	cress leaves green	lotus and water-chestnut leaves
茹蕙	soft grass	melilotus leaves	lotus petals
扶桑	giant tree	brake	the Fu-sang tree
若木	branch	a golden bough	the Jo-tree
琼茅	magic herbs	mistletoe	the holy plant
筵篲	slips of bamboo	herbs of magic	twigs of bamboo
荃蕙	sweet grass	the weeds angelicas	flag and melilotus
茅	weed stinking	herbs	straw
萧艾	weeds and wormwood	mugworts grey	worthless mugwort
揭车	stream-sage	the rumex	cart-halt
江离	halt-cart	selinea white	selinea
琼枝	jasper tree	jasper twigs	a branch of jasper

According to Table 1, this study can be contrastively analyzed and specifically interpreted. It can not only compare the different translation methods used by the three translators in translating the same plant horizontally, and compare the different translation effects achieved, but also summarize the translation methods preferred by the translators in general.

Method

This study is mainly based on the data collection and comparative analysis of the three translators' different methods of translating plant images. The first step is to read and record the plant names in "*Li Sao*", and find papers and materials to analyze what kind of plants they are; The second step is to read the three translations and

sort out the corresponding plant names; Finally, compare the plant terms in the original text with the plants in the translation to see if they are consistent. Through the analysis of the translator's translation strategies, we can find out the translation effect. In conclusion, this study includes statistical methods, comparative methods and exemplary methods.

Data Collection

The data collection is mainly to sort out the plant images determined in the original text of "*Li Sao*", including more than 40 kinds of plants, and then translate the plant names of the three translators into a table for convenient comparison and research. Through the comparison of the similarities and differences between Xu Yuanchong, Yang Xianyi and Hawkes' translation methods in the form of tables, the translation strategies adopted by the translators are simply sorted out, and why the translators adopt such translation strategies. The different strategies adopted by different translators are compared and analyzed. If there are difficulties, the follow-up analysis will be focused on. The translator's multiple translations of a plant image and the same translations of several plant images are selected, and the three different versions are analyzed to interpret the translation strategies used by the translator and the translation effects he wants to achieve. According to the selected examples, this paper probes into the general rules of the translation of plant images in *Li Sao* by different translators, and makes a general induction.

Results

The results of this study are a general summary of the translation methods used by Xu Yuanchong, Yang Xianyi and Hawks in the English translation of plant images.

Xu Yuanchong's Translation Features

Translators often adopt the method of free translation. In the English translation of the plant images of "Jiangli", "Pizhi", "Huizhi", "Du Heng", "Fangzhi", "Fusang", "Youlan", "Qiongmao" and "Mao", the translation strategy of domestication and free translation are adopted. Translating them into meaningful words such as sweet grass, sweet orchids, fragrant grass, soft grass, giant tree, magic herbs, weed stinking, etc., endows the plants with fragrance and stench. In fact, it represents the likes and dislikes of the author Qu Yuan in the original text of "*Li Sao*". For example, using fragrant grass as a metaphor refers to one's own moral integrity and does not conform to the secular world, and using evil grass as a metaphor refers to villains who follow the trend and form cliques for personal gain. By means of free translation, the translator expresses the implicit meaning of the original text, which is more accessible and easy to understand, making the source language culture closer to the target language culture and the reader's world. Readers can directly feel the emotional changes and expression forms of Qu Yuan, the author of *Li Sao*. In addition, the translator employs both literal translation and additional translation and omission translation techniques.

Yang Xianyi's Translation Features

Translators often adopt literal translation. In translating the images of plants such as "Mulan", "Huilai", "Du Heng", "Qiuju", "Xuili", "Hui", "Hibiscus", "Qiongmao", "Ai", etc., the foreignization translation strategy and literal translation method are adopted, and they are translated into a series of words such as magnolia, melilotus, azalea, aster petal, blue wistaria, angelica, lilies white, mistletoe, mugwort, dogwood, etc. In fact, the translator's

literal translation is to find out the possible corresponding plants of these plant images in reality and then translate them. Therefore, the translated words are actually more difficult to understand, and most of them are scientific names of plants. This is the use of foreignization translation strategy, that is to say, to retain a certain degree of exoticism in the target text, to break the conventional translation, and to fit the literal meaning of the original text, while the deep meaning needs to be explored as deeply as the readers of the original text before they can know it. Preserving the characteristics of the source language culture can actually enrich the target language culture and language expressions of the target language. But for the target language readers, it may be difficult to understand or even obscure. In addition, when it is difficult to find the corresponding plants, the translators have adopted a small number of free translation methods.

Hawkes' Translation Features

The translator adopts literal translation, free translation and transliteration. In translating the plant images of "Qiongmao", "Xiao Ai" and "Pizhi" into English, they are translated into meaningful words such as worthless mugwort, the holy plant, shady angelica by free translation, which fully demonstrates the personality of these plants, that is, useful or useless, and good or bad. Second, "Fusang" and "Qiongzhi" are transliterated as the Fu-sang tree, and the Jo-tree simply translates them as trees with different names, which will not cause misunderstanding to readers' reading. Translating the plant images of "Qiulan", "Shenjiao", "Jungui", "chrysanthemum", "Grass" and "Mao" into English as autumn orchids, pepper, cassia, chrysanthemum, twigs of bamboo, straw, dogwood, which directly indicate the species of plants, allows readers to directly perceive the context similar to the original text. However, unlike Yang's translation, because the translator takes the target language as his mother tongue and the source language as his second foreign language, the translator may have cognitive biases towards some plant varieties in translation, resulting in the translation of plants that are not completely suitable for the original text. However, the translators often use domestication as a translation strategy, and use a variety of translation methods to enable the target language readers to feel *Li Sao* with a localized understanding during the reading process.

Conclusion

In the study of the English translation of plant images of *Li Sao*, we have made a comparative study of three different versions. We find that there are significant differences in the expression of plant images in *Li Sao* in different English versions. Xu Yuanchong's translation pays more attention to the poetic expression of images, and through the use of rich vocabulary and rhetorical devices, the aesthetic feeling of plant images is more vividly displayed. Yang Xianyi's translation tends to be literal, striving to be faithful to the depiction of the original text, but sometimes sacrificing the fluency of the English language. These plant images may correspond to the plant in reality to find out the translation, so the translation vocabulary is actually more difficult to understand, most of which are the scientific names of plants. The Hawkes' version, on the other hand, adopts more translation methods, including literal translation, free translation, transliteration, etc., which not only retains the artistic conception of the original text, but also incorporates more suitable expressions for English readers. However, due to the translator's understanding, some deviations may occur. Through the comparative analysis, we can see the translation strategies and styles of different versions, as well as their reproduction of plant images, so as to better understand the presentation and transmission of *Li Sao* in the English versions.

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