

A Comparative Analysis of the English Translations of the Premier of Shu Based on the Three Criteria of Poetry Translation

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Abstract:

On the basis of an analysis of the three criteria of poetry translation formulated by Wang Feng, the nine English versions of *The Premier of Shu* are analyzed at the macro-, meso- and micro-levels. Based on the literature review and theoretical application, the comparative analysis method is used, and a detailed explanation of the three levels of poetry translation standard is carried out. The authors summarize the previous English versions of *The Premier of Shu*, and the authors' translation is put forward. The research findings show that it is scientific, rational and applicable to use the three levels of poetry translation standard in the field of poetry translation criticism.

Keywords:

Poetry Translation, the Premier of Shu, Three-Level Criteria, Eight Beauties, Translation Criticism

1. Introduction

The poem entitled *The Prime Minister* (蜀相, *shu xiang*) by Du Fu, a great poet of the Tang Dynasty, plays a vital role in the history of ancient Chinese poetry. It is also undeniable that *The Prime Minister* is a dazzling brilliant pearl in Chinese cultural treasure. This seven-character poem integrates the emotion and the scene with the in-depth discussion which combines the historical comments with the realistic implications. It can be seen as a swan song among the poems in praise of Zhuge Liang, the well-known prime minister of the Kingdom of Shu during the Three Kingdoms (220-280 AD). The poet Du Fu expresses his admiration for Zhuge Liang, his strong thirst after great talents when his native country was suffering the civil strife, as well as his patriotism of worrying about the country and the people (Tian 2013). The original poem is as follows:

丞相祠堂何处寻？锦官城外柏森森。
映阶碧草自春色，隔叶黄鹂空好音。
三顾频频天下计，两朝开济老臣心。
出师未捷身先死，长使英雄泪满襟。

The first line of the poem begins with a question which helps create a strong emotional atmosphere. The second line “In vain before the steps spring grass grows green and long / And amid the leaves golden orioles sing their song” (“映阶碧草自春色，隔叶黄鹂空好音”) is to describe the scenes inside the Wuhou Temple. However, the purpose of describing the scenery is to express the poet’s feeling of nostalgia for Zhuge Liang. On the surface it seems to be a factual description, but at the deep level it is lyrical. The third line of the poem uses two allusions. The first allusion is the famous story about Liu Bei’s three visits to Zhuge Liang’s thatched cottage to ask Zhuge for the stratagem for pacifying strife-ridden China. Zhuge Liang produced the well-known Longzhong plan for Liu Bei who later became the emperor of the Kingdom of Shu. The second allusion is Zhuge Liang’s assistance in helping Liu Bei found the Kingdom of Shu which lasted two generations. This verse line emphasizes Zhuge’s great loyalty to the imperial Han House. The last line of the poem “But he died before he accomplished his career / How could heroes not wet their sleeves with tear on tear” (“出师未捷身先死，长使英雄泪满襟”) is a household verse line in China which shows the deep sympathy with Zhuge Liang’s unsuccessful cause as well as his death in the army. In other words, Zhuge practiced his vow of “bending his back to the task until his dying day” (Zhang 2010).

Through the retrieval of some academic literature databases such as CNKI, the authors of this paper have found that there are few studies on the English translation of *The Prime Minister*. Therefore, this paper compares and analyzes the nine English translations of the poem according to Dr. Wang Feng’s three-level poetry translation standard, and examines its applicability and rationality in poetry translation criticism via the case study.

2. An Overview of The Three-Level Poetry Translation Standard

Wang Feng (2015) proposes the three-level standard for poetry translation, including the harmony at the macro-level, the resemblance in style, sense and poetic realm at the meso-level and the eight-layer criteria at the micro-level. The eight-layer criteria consist of the beauty in form, the musical beauty, the beauty in imagery, the beauty in feelings, the beauty in diction, the beauty in language, the beauty in allusions and the beauty in Gestalt.

2.1. The Global Level: Harmony

The harmony at the macro-level means that what is neutral needs to be defined as similar to Zheng Hailing’s (2000) “harmony theory”, emphasizing the beauty of harmony within various aesthetic forms and advocating the “harmony” of being neutral. At the macro-level, it guides poetry translation practice and poetry translation criticism. Wang Feng (2015) proposes that the three-level neutralization theory inherits the concepts of “neutralization” and “moderateness” in ancient Chinese philosophical thoughts and the concept of “neutral beauty” in classical Chinese aesthetics. This standard can guide poetry translation practice and poetry translation criticism at the macro-level.

2.2. The Meso-Level: Resemblance in Style, Sense And Poetic Realm

At the meso-level, Wang Feng (2015) proposes that poetry translation should adhere to the resemblance in style, sense and poetic realm. In other words, the style

should be similar, the sense should be the same, and the artistic conception should be similar in poetry translation.

2.2.1. Resemblance in Style

Style is the creative personality and artistic expression gradually formed by the author in practice, reflecting the author's creation and philosophy. Poetry has different styles, and style is an indispensable component of poetry. The concept of *ge shi* (格似) means that the style of the translation is similar to that of the original. For poems with different styles, we should use a variety of translation methods and cultural strategies to preserve the style and cultural characteristics of the original text in the culture of the translated language. The translator is supposed to try to achieve similar styles in translation, and consider language and cultural differences in the translation process, and try to convey the original's artistic conception.

2.2.2. Resemblance in Sense

Resemblance in sense refers to the poetic harmony between the translated poem and the original poem, and it requires the translator to achieve hypotaxis in translating according to the standard of English hypotaxis so as to conform to the formal features of English.

2.2.3. Resemblance in Poetic Realm

Resemblance in poetic realm refers to the comprehensive effect of the artistic conception produced by the translated poem in the reader's mind and the similar effect of the original poem in the minds of the original reader. It can be argued that the translation might lose the original artistic conception as well as the spirit of the original work in poetry translation if effective translating methods were not employed. There are roughly five ways to generate the artistic conception: production of a sense in the artistic conception, production of an artistic conception via a sense, co-production of sense and artistic conception, presence of a sense in an artistic conception and presence of an artistic conception in a sense. When translating, we must fully consider the existence and aesthetic style of the original artistic conception, and more effectively convey the poetic flavor of the original poetry. Lin Yutang (1987) believes that "the translation of the artistic conception focuses on the proper use of vivid words." If this pursuit can be achieved in translating poetry, the artistic conception can be fully reproduced.

3. A Case Study of the English Translations of The Prime Minister

The following part is a comparative study of the nine English versions of Du Fu's *The Prime Minister* according to the three-level poetry translation standard, with an aim of verifying that the standard is effective, scientific, rational and applicable. The nine translation versions include: (1) Sun Dayu's *Chancellor of Shu*; (2) Witter Bynner's *The Temple of the Premier of Shu*; (3) Louis Alley's *The Temple of Zhuge Liang*; (4) Yilin's *The Temple of the Prime Minister of Shu*; (5) Xu Yuanchong's *Temple of the Primer of Shu*; (6) David Hawkes's *The Chancellor of Shu*; (7) W. J. B. Fletcher's *CHUKUOLIANG*; (8) Li Huaijian's *The Prime Minister of Shu*; (9) Zhang Bingxing's *The Temple of the Prime Minister of Shu* (see Appendix).

3.1. A Global View of Harmony

Only by harmony can the translated poetry retain the charm of the original one, achieving the unity of hypotactic harmony and paratactic harmony, and helping the target reader appreciate and accept the translator's success in dealing with the differences between the source and target languages. When the translation is not harmonious, there must be a contradiction in dealing English hypotaxis and Chinese parataxis because English is the language of formal harmony and Chinese is the language of semantic harmony. However, the translator's consideration of the meaning of the original poetry preserves the charm of the original poem and allows the target reader to accept the rendering. Several translations such as Hawkes's, Xu's and Fletcher's renderings in the corpus succeed in reproducing the original beauty by striking a good balance between hypotaxis and parataxis (Tian 2018).

3.2. Resemblance in Style, Sense and Poetic Realm

The resemblance in style, sense and poetic realm means that the style of the translation is as close as possible to that of the original poem. As far as the style of *The Prime Minister* is concerned, the first two sentences in it are euphemistic and naturally compact, and the last two sentences are a discussion made by the poet. The second part of the first verse line “锦官城外柏森森” indicates that the poet hangs around the outskirts of Chengdu's Wuhou Temple. Here, the cypress trees are leafy, tall and dense, producing a quiet and solemn atmosphere. Cypress has a long life and remains green all the year round. Tall, straight and symbolic, it is often used as an ornamental tree in the temple. The poet grasps this scene of the Wuhou Temple, showing the sleek, lush, vigorous and simple image of the cypress, which reminds people of the spirit of Zhuge Liang. From the translational point of view, all the translations in the corpus have their own merits. David Hawkes translates “柏森森” into “densely growing cypresses”, while Witter Bynner's rendering is “deep pine”, W. J. B. Fletcher's, “eternal spring”; Li Huaijian's, “cypresses”. These renderings can all reflect the stalwart feature of cypress.

The resemblance in sense refers to the reproduction of the original meaning. In this respect, the translations in the corpus also have their own merits. From the point of view of the subject matter and the poet's intended meaning, we must consider the difference between Chinese and English and its effect on translating. There are differences in the translation of the original title “蜀相” in the translations. Sun translates “蜀相” into *Chancellor of Shu*; Bynner, into *The Temple of the Premier of Shu*; the Yilin publisher, into *The Temple of Zhuge Liang*; Wu Juntao, into *The Temple of the Prime Minister of Shu*; Xu Yuanhong, into *Temple of the Primer of Shu*; Hawkes, into *The Chancellor of Shu*. Bynner, Alley, Wu, Xu and Zhang Bingxing choose the word “temple”, and translate “蜀相” into “the temple of the prime minister”, namely “Wuhou Temple” which is not appropriate because the focus of the title is “Zhuge Liang” instead of a place called “Wuhou Temple”. Therefore, these translations fail to reproduce the original meaning. Comparatively speaking, Hawkes, Sun and some other translators are successful in this regard.

The artistic conception can be divided into four parts: “feeling”, “scene”, “void” and “beauty”. The words “自春色” (“from spring color”) and “空好音” (“empty good sounds”) in the source text show that in the beautiful spring scenery there is no way to recover the hero's death, the traces of the ruins, the plant metabolism and the great ancients. It indicates the poet's deep sorrow for Zhuge Liang. In Wu Juntao's translation, “自春色” is translated as “The grass round the steps reflects the colour of

spring”, which simply states that green grass implies the arrival of spring. Sun Dayu translates it as “reflect on the steps vernal hues by itself”, and Bynner’s rendering is “with the green grass of spring colouring the steps”. When translating “自春色”, these translators simply point out that the green grass implies the arrival of spring, failing to clarify the implied meaning of the grass. The translations by Wu Juntao and Sun Dayu use the word “reflect” which means “thinking deeply of something”. The original verse line “The reflection of the blue grass from the spring” implies to some extent the arrival of spring, so the translation fails to represent the meaning of the original poem. Xu Yuanchong’s translation is “in vain spring grass grows green colouring the steps here”, in which “in vain” points out the hidden meaning of the grass, so Xu’s rendering uncovers some emotional information of the original and thus it is convenient for the target reader to understand the original beauty and the target text achieves the same artistic conception as in the original poetry (Xu & Tian 2017).

3.3. A Local View of Eight Beauties in Poetry Translation

“Beauty” is one of the main pursuits of literary translation. A translation that is not beautiful cannot be called a literary translation. This feature of grace should be reflected in the translation of poetry. Wang Feng (2015) draws on Xu Yuanchong’s theory of three beauties, Qi Zhengkun’s theory of specific poetry, Lin Yutang’s theory of five beauties and Peter Newmark’s translational aesthetics, proposing eight new standards for poetry translation: 1) beauty in form; 2) musical beauty; 3) beauty in imagery; 4) beauty in feelings; 5) beauty in diction; 6) beauty in language; 7) beauty in allusions; 8) beauty in Gestalt.

First of all, the translated poem should reproduce the formal beauty of the original. There are four lines in *The Prime Minister*, each line containing two parts. Xu Yuanchong’s translation is concise, each line using the same number of syllables, and the rhyme in the fourth, sixth and eighth lines representing the formal beauty of the source text. It is believed that the beauty in poetic form is the first to cause the reader’s aesthetic response, producing a pleasant visual effect and enhancing the expressive power of emotion. Xu translates the original into eight lines, corresponding to the number of the original parts and strictly following the requirements of metrical poetry, namely the rhyming scheme of “aa, bb, cc, dd”. In comparison, the formal beauty in Alley’s translation is less than in some other translations. Its rhythm is like that of a free verse; each line is uneven in that the number of syllables in the lines is different. The translations by W. J. B. Fletcher and Witter Bynner are lengthy and structurally better; the number of syllables in their lines is from 10 to 12; in other words, the number of syllables in each line is similar. Fletcher uses 9 to 11 syllables in each line. Bynner’s rendering is similar to Fletcher’s, using 9 to 11 words for each line, and the long and short lines are symmetrical, producing a certain form of beauty.

Compared with the original poem, Sun Dayu’s rendering uses longer sentences than in the source text, even though the line number of the target text corresponds to that of the original parts. Moreover, the original poem has four lines, but the translation contains eight lines. As for the rhythm, the number of syllables in each line is 13, 14, 14, 11, 12, 11, 15 and 15. It can be argued that there is basically no similar rhythm in Sun’s rendering. As a result, the formal beauty is absent in it.

Second, the translated poem should reproduce the musical beauty of the original. As far as rhyming is concerned, Xu’s rendering uses the rhyme pattern of “aa, bb, cc, dd” which reproduces the musical beauty of the original poem. In the original poem, the

poet's emotional changes are synchronized with the rhythm of the poetry, showing regular changes, harmony in confrontation, and melody in repetition (Ren 2014). This is what the translator should pay special attention to.

Third, the translated poem should reproduce the imagery beauty of the original. For example, the translation is supposed to reproduce the astuteness and resourcefulness of Zhuge Liang as the Prime Minister. The translation of Zhang Bingxing is accurate and easy to understand. The words “shed tears” in the translation really make us shed tears generation after generation! And the expression “generation after generation” in the translation shows that the tears wet the clothes, and thus the original imagery is conveyed in an exaggerated way. It can be argued that the translation is simple and powerful. The last sentence “how could heroes’ tears not wet their dress?” is a rhetorical question, which expresses the meaning of the original poem and which is thought-provoking. Therefore, it is thought that the translation successfully conveys the original imagery.

Fourth, the translated poem should reproduce the original emotional beauty. *The Prime Minister* is an epic poem created by the famous poet Du Fu in the Tang Dynasty after he settled in Chengdu’s thatched cottage and visited the Wuhou Temple in the following year. The poet visited the ancient monuments, eulogizing that Zhuge Liang assisted the emperors of two generations for the Kingdom of Shu and regretting that Zhuge had died without achieving his goal for Shu. The poet strongly feels that Zhuge supported the orthodox concept of the Han House, but he was confronted with a difficult situation (Tian & Wang 2017).

Fifth, the translated poem should reproduce the subtle beauty of the original. The implied beauty is reflected in the translation of the original word “空”. In Xu’s rendering, “空” is rendered into “in vain” which explains that the orioles’ songs are separated by the leaves, but the poet is not in the mood for listening to them because the heroes he admires are no longer alive. At the deep level, the word “空” implies that the singing of the orioles is not appreciated by the poet.

Sixth, the translated poem should reproduce the allusive beauty of the original. The word “锦官” (*jing guan*) is an alias for Chengdu, the capital of Sichuan Province. In the translations in the corpus, Wu Juntao translates it into “Chengdu”, using the method of transliteration. Xu Yuanchong renders it into the “Town of Brocade”, using the method of free translation. The word “Jingguan” originally referred to the brocade industry, and Chengdu was quite prosperous in the Han Dynasty due to the rapid development of the brocade industry. It became an important source for the brocade of tribute to the royal court. Therefore, the court established the special administration for brocade (i.e. “Jingguan”) in Chengdu, and thus the “Jingguan City” which was also called “Jingcheng” was built in the southwest of Chengdu City (Yang & Qiu 1995). As a result, “Jingguan City” and “Jingcheng” became another name for Chengdu. The expression “town of brocade” can represent the meaning of the historical name of “Jingguan” as well as the historical evolution of the name. However, the “city of silk” used by Bynner only reproduces the meaning of “Jingguan City”. In the third line, the allusion is related to Liu Bei who visited Zhuge’s cottage thrice in succession. Fletcher’s rendering fails to clarify the allusion, and thus the target reader is unable to understand the original completely.

Seventh, translated poetry should pursue the beauty of refined language. A good case in point is the word “森森” (*sen sen*) in the original. Sun, Bynner, Wu and Li

select different adjectives to represent its meaning, such as “thick”, “deep” and “ample”. Xu translates it into the adverb “around” to imply a multitude of cypresses. David Hawkes uses the adverb “densely” to translate “森森”. On the other hand, Xu’s translation of “空” as a highlight in the original is “in vain” which implies that any effort is futile. Bynner translates it into “happily”; Li, into “merrily” which is quite different from the original meaning; Hawkes, into “unheard”. Among the eight versions, Bynner, Wu and Alley use the verbs “wept”, “weep”, “grieve” and “shed” to reproduce the noun “泪”, while Xu’s translation is “tears on tears”; Fletcher’s, “rain”; Sun’s, “tears”. In these translations, we think that the translations of “rain” and “tears on tears” are more vivid, reflecting the degree to which the tears wet the clothes.

On the basis of referring to all the strengths of the translations and according to the three-level poetry translation standard, we have produced a retranslation of *The Prime Minister*, aiming to express the meaning, tone and style of the original poem in English. The retranslation goes as follows:

The Premier of Shu

Where shall I find the temple erected for the Premier?
Deeply in the cypresses outside the Town of Brocade.
In vain spring grass grows green colouring the steps here,
The golden orioles’ songs no one is there to hear.
Thrice the Emperor visited him for the mighty dynasty,
Serving two generations did prove his loyalty.
Yet he died before accomplishing his career,
How could heroes not wet their sleeves with drips of tear!

In the above retranslation, first of all, the title is improved based on the existing renderings. The translation of “Wuhou Temple” is not adopted, but the translation “Zhuge Liang” is more vivid and expressive. To some extent, this rendering reflects the beauty of imagery according to Wang Feng’s three-level poetry translation standard. Secondly, “柏森森” is translated into “deeply in the cypresses”, and the word “deeply” reflects the thickness of the cypresses. The latter part of “no one is there to hear” in the fourth line conveys the artistic conception of the original poem. The orioles are singing in the leaves, but the poet is not interested in listening to them because he cannot see the heroes he admires. The phrase “serving two generations” in the sixth line also reflects the beauty of allusions, suggesting that Zhuge Liang assisted Liu Bei in creating a Han dynasty and supporting his son Liu Zen. The words “wet their sleeves” in the last line convey the micro-level beauty of imagery and emotion. The retranslation represents the beauty in form. Most of the verse lines use 14 syllables and the rhyming pattern is “bb, cc, dd”. The new translation is easy to read and has a certain musical beauty. In a word, it can be seen via our experiment of poetry retranslation that the three-level poetry translation standard is rational and applicable in poetry translation and criticism.

4. Conclusions

Under the guidance of the three-level poetry translation standard, we have conducted a tentative analysis of the translations of *The Prime Minister*, and made a

comparative study of them at the macro-, meso- and micro-levels. “Harmony” is the guidance at the macro-level. “Resemblance in style, sense and poetic realm” is the rule at the meso-level. The eight beauties of poetry translation are of great help in the translation of poetry at the micro-level. It can be concluded that the three-level translation standard of poetry in poetry translation criticism is scientific, reasonable and applicable. Undoubtedly, the standard also has its limitations. First, the specific criteria of eight beauties are not well elaborated in practical criticism. Second, not all poems can be evaluated using the standard. Third, when Chinese poems are translated into English, the target text cannot properly convey the original spirit which may partially get lost. As far as future poetry translation studies are concerned, the quantitative criteria for the eight beauties should be flexible with respect to different poetic themes. If a specific quantitative standard can be proposed, it is a further sublimation of the three-level eight beauties theory. At the same time, empirical research can be conducted to assess the degree of acceptance of the translation in the culture of the target language.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

Appendix

Temple of the Premier of Shu

Where is the famous premier’s temple to be found?
Outside the Town of Brocade with cypresses around.
In vain before the steps spring grass grows green and long,
And amid the leaves golden orioles sing their song.
Thrice the king visited him for the State’s gains and pains;
He served heart and soul the kingdom during two reigns.
But he died before he accomplished his career.
How could heroes not wet their sleeves with tear on tear!

(Tr. Xu Yuanchong)

Chancellor of Shu

The Memorial Hall of the Chancellor -- where is its site to be found ?
Beyond th’ walls of Jinguan Town, a cedar old riseth there thickset and tall.
The fresh verdure of th’ lawn reflecteth on the steps vernal hues by itself;
In the foliage chanteth in vain the golden oriole’s tuneful call.
Being visited thrice and then oft times conferred on affairs of statecraft,
In installing and propping up two reigns as their adamant support,
You in person the state’s corps dispatch led, but died before triumph could be won:
It doth make all our heroes, for mourning your noble cause, to tears e’er resort.

(Tr. Sun Dayu)

The Temple of Zhugeliang

Looking for the temple to Zhuge Liang I find it
Outside the city under cypresses; green grasses
Amongst the paving stones
Reminding of spring, little birds
Hidden amongst the branches all
A-twittering; and I think of how
Three times the prince called
Zhuge Liang to serve him, how then
Two reigns gave this statesman
Room to plan; sad that he had
To die before he gained victory,
Leaving great men of
Succeeding generations
To grieve for him.

(Tr. Louis Alley)

The Chancellor of Shu

Where is the shrine of the Chancellor to be found?
Beyond the walls of the City of Brocade,
amidst the densely growing cypresses.
Vivid against the steps, the emerald grass
celebrates its own spring unseen.
Beyond the trees a yellow oriole sings its glad song unheard.
The importunate humility of these three visits
resulted in the grand strategy which shaped a world for a generation;
His service under two reigns, both as a founder and a maintainer
revealed the true loyalty of the old courtier's heart.
That he should have died before victory could crown his expedition.

(Tr. David Hawkes)

The Temple of the Premier of Shu

Where is the temple of the famous Premier?
In a deep pine grove near the city of Silk,
with the green grass of spring colouring the steps,
And birds chirping happily under the leaves.
The third summons weighted him with affairs of state

And two generations he gave his true heart,
But before he could conquer, he was dead;
And heroes have wept on their coats ever since.

(Tr. Witter Bynner)

CHUKUOLIANG

Where shall we find the temple erected to brave Kung-ming?

Outside the stairway hold there eternal Spring
Golden orioles sheltered in foliage warble of him.
Busied on every hand, he planned whole empires great.
Aided by him were founded mighty dynasties twain.
Just when his army was winning, falling a victim to Fate,
Drip to his memory heroes' tears on their breasts like rain.

(Tr. W. J. B. Fletcher)

The Prime Minister of Shu

Where is the temple to the Prime Minister of Shu?
There, in the place of cypresses outside the city.
Stone steps tinged with the green of fresh spring grass.
Orioles singing in the foliage -- all to no avail.
Thrice visited, he was asked to estimate the situation
And present his plans for bringing peace to nation;
Serving father and son, he did prove his loyalty
In helping to create and consolidate the Kingdom.
Alas! Death befell ere victory was achieved.
Which makes heroes shed tears of deep regret.

(Tr. Li Huaijian)

The Temple of the Prime Minister of Shu

Where can the Temple of Premier Zhuge Liang be found?
It is located among thick pine and cypress trees in the suburb of Chengdu City grand.
Green grasses growing on the stone steps indicate the arrival of spring duly.
Golden orioles among thick leaves twitter merrily.
Once the Emperor of Shu visited your thatched cottage,
three times in succession, For strategies to rule the nation.
You assisted rulers of two dynasties in succession.
But, alas, you passed away, contrary to our expectation,
Before you succeeded in the expedition,

Thus making heroes shed tears generation after generation!

(Tr. Zhang Bingxing)

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