

An Analysis of the Aesthetic Features in the English Versions of Li Bai's "Hard Is the Journey (I)" from the Perspective of "Eight Beauties Criteria"

Ying Ting

School of Foreign Studies, Yangtze University, Jingzhou, China

Wang Feng*

School of Foreign Studies, Yangtze University, Jingzhou, China
Visiting Research Scholar at Kent State University, Kent, Ohio, US

Ma Yan

School of Foreign Studies, Yangtze University, Jingzhou, China

Abstract

The combination of translation theory and aesthetics has a unique position in the translation theories with Chinese characteristics. It is better to learn poetry or to translate poetry from the perspective of beauty. Dr. Wang Feng's "Harmony-Guided Three-Level Poetry Translation Criteria" is one of the latest poetry translation theories in China, which provides a more comprehensive and effective perspective for poetry translation. This paper, taking several English versions of Li Bai's "Hard Is the Journey (I)" as the object, explores how the "Eight Beauties Criteria" in Dr. Wang Feng's "Harmony-Guided Three-Level Poetry Translation Criteria" can be applied in translation practice. It proves the practical value of "Eight Beauties Criteria" in the translation practice of classical Chinese poetry in better carrying forward its aesthetic thoughts and aesthetic charm, and better helping Chinese culture to go out.

Keywords: Harmony-guided three-level poetry translation criteria; Eight beauties criteria; Hard is the journey; Aesthetics.



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1. Introduction

Aesthetics, the philosophy of art of beauty, is a subject that focuses on the study of the essence and significance of beauty. It embodies all the aesthetic phenomena of the aesthetic relationship between man and the world. The combination of translation theories and aesthetics has become a pearl in the sea of translation theories with Chinese characteristics, and the two are inseparable. Poetry translation is a process of creating beauty. Although "seeking beauty" is not the only goal of poetry translation, its essence is aesthetic reproduction. Therefore, a translated poem should not only convey the information but also show its aesthetic feelings. Classical Chinese poetry is a treasure of Chinese culture and world culture, and Tang poetry is undoubtedly one of the most important parts of them. Therefore, the research and practice of Tang poetry translation are not only helpful to the development of Tang poetry itself but also plays a significant role in the study of Chinese culture. One of the representative works of Li Bai, a great romantic poet in the Tang dynasty, is "Hard Is the Journey," which reflects Li Bai's consistent style of writing, concise and fresh language, harmonious and fluent rhythm, and witty allusions. Therefore, many famous translators at home and abroad have carried out research and translation practice in his poems. Due to the different orientations of Chinese and Western translation theories and aesthetics, as well as the differences in language and culture, each translation has its characteristics. Several highly recognized versions in China are created by famous translators such as Xu Yuanchong, Wu Juntao, Xu Zhongjie, and Zhang Bingxing. There are also many popular translations abroad by W.J.B. Fletcher, Arthur (Cooper, 1973; Jenyns, 1940; Martin, 1894), Witter Bynner & Kiang Kang-hu, Innes (Herdan, 1973), etc.

2. Aesthetic Studies in Translation at Home and Abroad

Translation itself is an art. By accurate transmission of the source language information, translation is a process of artistic recreation in which the style, emotion, form and artistic conception of the source language are presented one by one. Aesthetic studies in translation have a long history both at home and abroad because translation theory and aesthetics are inseparable.

2.1. Aesthetic Studies of Western Translation Studies

Western translation theories contain philosophical ideas, which are the origin of aesthetics. Cicero (106 BC-43 BC), the Roman philosopher, statesman, orator, and political theorist, demanded "to attain an elegance of expression with words appropriate and metaphorical" (Cicero, 1890), while Jerome and Dryden believed that the translation should be as plain as the spoken language. In his book *Essay On the Principles of Translation*, Tytler (1907), believes that "it is necessary, not only that the translation should contain a perfect transcript of the sentiments of the original and present like-wise a resemblance of its style and manner; but also the translation should have all the ease of original composition." That is to say, a good translation should try to restore the style and aesthetic feeling of the

*Corresponding Author: fwang14@kent.edu

original work. Matthew Arnold, a translator in the 19th century, advocated that the key to translating poetry lies in the translator's deep understanding of the aesthetics of "truth" in his works and the expression of such understanding in comfortable words and natural ways, while avoiding the artificial modification in pursuit of the unity of the form of poetry (Liu, 1986). In early western theories, aesthetic thought in philosophy was the main theoretical support. In the 1930s and 1940s, philosophy became the weapon of western translation theory. Even today, western aesthetics still has a deep philosophical connotation. So many western scholars follow the philosophy when they study aesthetics. In the past 30 years, western translation theories have made remarkable achievements in many aspects, including strict methodology, detailed theoretical description, and accurate qualitative and quantitative analysis. "The most prominent feature of modern translation theory is its pioneering spirit and creativity, and translation theory is flourishing because of its theoretical vitality in various disciplines of modern linguistics." (Liu, 1986).

2.2. A Study of Chinese Translation Aesthetics

The combination of translation theories and aesthetics constitutes a unique scenic line of translation theories with Chinese characteristics. Most of the translation theories in the history of translation in China are aesthetic explorations and comments on the translation, mainly focusing on the aesthetic proposition of content and form. The translation of Buddhist Sutras in ancient China is based on the mainstream proposition of "disputes over literary quality."

As for Xuanzang's translation criteria, "seeking truth and aiming to popularize" and "five categories of untranslatable terms" ushered in the heyday of classical Chinese translation. In modern times, the study of translation aesthetics has continued to develop. Yan Fu pointed out in the preface of *Evolution and Ethics* "three difficulties in translation: faithfulness, expressiveness, and elegance." Yan and Huxley (1986), Lu Xun said in the *Outline of the History of Chinese Literature*: "First, the beauty of meaning touches the heart; second, the beauty of sound touches the ears; third, the beauty of form touches the eyes." (Lu, 2008) According to the writer Lin Yutang, the beauty of writing is reflected in five aspects: beauty in sound, beauty in sense, beauty in spirit, beauty in energy, beauty in form. Lin (1995). In the mid-1960s, Qian Zhongshu put forward the idea of "transmigration" (Qian, 1985), from the traditional aesthetic point of view, and then Xu Yuanchong developed the predecessors' theories and put forward the "three beauties criteria": "beauty of meaning, beauty of form and beauty of sound" (Xu, 2003). Gu Zhengkun proposed the "Five Images" (Gu, 2010) theory from the aesthetic point of view of poetry appreciation. The latest achievement in poetry translation theories with Chinese characteristics is Dr. Wang Feng's "Harmony-Guided Three Level" poetry translation criteria, marking the epitome of poetry or literary translation theories because it can effectively guide poetry translation practice and poetry translation criticism. Generally speaking, the development of aesthetic standards of translation in China has gradually become more mature, with a more solid theoretical basis and more scientific and systematic research methods.

3. Harmony-Guided Three-Level Poetry Translation Criteria

The English translation of Chinese poetry includes six kinds of disharmonies: art vs science, lyricism vs narration, tone pattern vs stresses syllables, parataxis vs hypotaxis, implication vs exaggeration (Wang and Ma, 2011). In order to deal with these six disharmonies, Dr. Wang Feng put forward the "Harmony-Guided Three-Level Poetry Translation Criteria": at the macro level, "Harmony" is regarded as the criterion; at the middle level, "resemblance in style, sense and poetic conception"; the "Eight Beauties Criteria" at the micro level provides specific guidelines and solutions for poetry translation.

3.1. Macro Level: Harmony

"Harmony" guides the practice and criticism of poetry translation at the macro level. The English translation of poetry involves not only two languages but two cultures. Therefore, when presenting poetry, the two languages will bring about different levels and degrees of contradictions. Harmony inherits the doctrine of the mean in ancient Chinese philosophy, which can well turn disagreements into harmony and balance.

3.2. Middle Level: Resemblance in Style, Sense, and Poetic Conception

This category at the middle level emphasizes three points. First, the style should be similar to that of the original poem. Second, the poetic meaning should be consistent with that of the original poem. Third, the comprehensive effect of mood produced by the translated poetry in the target reader's mind is similar to that of the original poem in the original reader's mind.

3.3. Micro level: Eight Beauties Criteria

The "Eight Beauties Criteria" at the micro level is the theoretical core of the "Harmony-Guided Three-Level Poetry Translation Criteria," which is used to guide the analysis of the translation of Li Bai's "Hard Is the Journey (I)." First, beauty of form refers to the unity of the external forms of poetry, including the number of lines, arrangement, length, indentation, structure and so on; second, beauty of musicality refers to the aesthetic sound formed through rhythm and meter in poetry; third, the beauty of image refers to the organic combination of subjective emotion and external images. Cultural images create great challenges for translators (Tian, 2018). The beauty of Chinese image has its characteristics, and translators need to accurately grasp the connotation of the image so that it can be displayed in the target language. Fourth, the beauty of emotion refers to that which poets express through scenery and objects. Fifth, it is the beauty of suggestiveness, which is one of the unique aesthetic

characteristics of Chinese poetry, full of implication and great charm. Sixth, the beauty of diction refers to the best choice of words and phrases. Seventh, the beauty of allusions refers to the aesthetic feeling of allusions in the reader's mind. Eighth, the beauty of gestalt refers to the beauties in all aspects except the seven beauties as mentioned above, pursuing the comprehensive sense that the whole is greater than the sum of the parts. (Wang and Ma, 2011).

Dr. Wang Feng's "Harmony-Guided Three-Level Poetry Translation Criteria" absorbs the excellent translation theories of China and the West. It is an innovation and development of poetry translation theories and aesthetic theories not only in China but also in the world, and it has rich practical and theoretical significance.

4. An Analysis of Li Bai's "Hard is the Journey (I)"

4.1. Li Bai and "Hard Is the Journey (I)"

Li Bai (701-762) is the greatest poet of the Romantic school in the Tang Dynasty, who longed for the emperor's appreciation all his life, but his career suffered many times. "Hard Is the Journey (I)" was written in 744, the third year of Tianbao period in the reign of Emperor Xuanzong. The Chinese poem reads:

金樽清酒斗十千，玉盘珍羞直万钱。
 停杯投箸不能食，拔剑四顾心茫然。
 欲渡黄河冰塞川，将登太行雪满山。
 闲来垂钓碧溪上，忽复乘舟梦日边。
 行路难！行路难！多歧路，今安在？
 长风破浪会有时，直挂云帆济沧海。

At that time, the government of the Tang Dynasty had been controlled by the group of Li Linfu. Although Li Bai was full of enthusiasm and ambition, he was excluded, suppressed, and eventually trapped. When he was given gold by the emperor and forced to return home, his friends gave a banquet to him. Because of the mixed feelings of grief and indignation, he wrote the famous seven-character poem. Li Bai used the metaphor of "Hard Is the Journey" to describe the danger of the world and to express his uncontrollable anger, but he did not give up his political ideal. This poem shows the poet's optimistic and heroic attitude toward the future of life, full of positive and enterprising spirit (Wang, 2015).

"Hard Is the Journey (I)" is one of Li Bai's masterpieces. Many ingenious allusions, rich images, musical rhythm, and emotional twists and turns have made it one of the classics of narrative poetry. The first four lines of the poem use the method of contradiction to show the poet's inner distress. Li Bai changed his usual life attitude, as shown in "One should enjoy his success to the most, / Lest he would only hold a golden but empty cup under the moon" and "Mutton and beef are well prepared; / Shall we have three hundred cupfuls to get relaxed." Instead, he refused the fine banquet offered by his friends, which fully reflected the poet's inner distress and depression. The latter two lines "crossing a river is not possible" and "climbing a mountain is not allowed" have shown the puzzlement of the poet's mood. However, after a short period of confusion, he was full of vigor, optimism, and hope for the future when thinking about the story of Lv Shang and Yi Yin. The last two lines of the poem fully reflected his grand momentum, self-confidence, and optimism.

Scholars overseas who translated Li Bai's poems include Arthur Cooper, Florence Ayscough and Amy Lowell. In China, scholars include Yang Xianyi, Xu Yuanchong, and Xu Zhongjie. Since the beginning of the 20th century, there has been an upsurge in the translation of Li Bai's poems into English. The English versions of "Hard Is the Journey (I)" also emerge in endlessly. The translated versions can be roughly divided into two categories: rhythmic verse, represented by Xu Yuanchong, Wu Juntao, and Xu Zhongjie, and free verse, represented by W.A.P. Martin, and Arthur Cooper. Next, the authors will use Dr. Wang Feng's "Eight Beauty Criteria" to comment on the seven English versions of "Hard Is the Journey (I)" respectively by Xu Yuanchong, Wu Juntao, Xu Zhongjie, Arthur Cooper, W. A. P. Martin, Inne Herdan and Soame Jenyns.

4.2. An Analysis of the Translated Versions Under the Eight Beauties Criteria

4.2.1. Beauty of Form and Musicality

The beauty of form and musicality are both aesthetic features on the surface. It is difficult to achieve complete equivalence as Chinese and English belong to different language families. "The poetry rhythm developed and shaped from the characteristics of Chinese characters is unique. Integrated with Chinese characters, it cannot be expressed in another language in the same beauty at all (Wu, 1984). Therefore, when reproducing such aesthetic features of poems, we should not pay too much attention to them. That is, the beauty of form and musicality should not be placed in the highest position. On the premise of considering another aesthetic reproducibility, "beauty of form" can be placed in a less critical position. However, as poems are characterized by their precise and harmonious rhythm, clever uses of rhyme and rhythm can well reflect the emotion and theme of the poems. Therefore, the beauty of musicality is still one of the quintessences in the translation of Tang poetry, which should be reproduced as much as possible in the translation.

The best translation considering the beauty of form and musicality is that of Mr. Xu Yuanchong, followed by the translations of Mr. Xu Zhongjie and Wu Juntao. The rhyming scheme of Xu Yuanchong and Xu Zhongjie is aabb, which is generally an iambic heptameter and is catchy to read. The length and structure of the lines are elegant. Mr. Wu Juntao's rhyming scheme is abab, which is also composed of iambic heptameters. Almost every couplet of his translation has achieved unity with a high degree of beauty in form and musicality. However, Arthur Cooper's

translated poem divides a single Chinese line into two simple short lines or phrases to highlight the key points, so that readers can quickly understand the main idea. Take the first sentence as an example, the original sentence “金樽清酒斗十千,玉盘珍馐直万钱” was divided into four small lines, as follows:

“Gold vessels of fine wines,
thousands a gallon,
Jade dishes of rare meats,
costing more thousands,”

Although Arthur Cooper's translation has a large number of short lines, its bright momentum, clear rhythm and powerful reading make it easier for readers to focus on the phrases of "thousands a gallon" and "costing more thousands." The more delicate and luxurious the farewell dinner is, the more intensive the contradiction is, regarding Li Bai's inner depression and indignation. It is better to highlight the author's emotions. Although the beauty of rhyme is not achieved, its beauty of sentence structure in the translation has its characteristics and advantages.

4.2.2. Beauty of Image and Emotion

The beauty of image and emotion are deep and subjective aesthetic characteristics, which are closely related. The beauty of image is the combination of subjective emotion and external image while beauty in emotion is one of the most important aesthetic elements in Chinese poetry. The accurate reproduction of the beauty of image indirectly reproduces the beauty of emotion. Su Dongpo once advocated "the unity of realm and artistic conception" (Volume 2 of *Su Dongpo's Preface and Postscript*), which shows that the realm is relying on emotions. A good poem does well at the unity of realm and artistic conception. Therefore, the beauty of image and beauty of emotion often complement each other.

This poem is rich in images. "Yellow River," "Taihang," "snow" and "ice" symbolize the difficulties and obstacles on the road of life. "Can't cross the river" and "can't climb the mountain" reflect the author's helpless and depressed feelings. Therefore, translators should firmly grasp the beauty of images and emotions presented by these images. In the context of the poem, there is no significant difference between the Chinese and Western images. It is feasible to adopt literal translation, which is adopted by all six translators except W.A.P. Martin. However, W.A.P. Martin's translation of "黄河" into "river" cannot fully reflect the difficulty of crossing the river. We should know that the original text implies the difficulties of the poet's official career through the difficulty of "crossing the Yellow River," which indirectly foils the poet's indignation and helplessness. When translated into "river," it loses the equivalence of beauty in image and emotion to the original text. W.A.P. Martin also translated "太行山" into "Olympus peak". Lin Tongduan said that retaining the images in the original text is the most important thing and that the original image should be reproduced in the translation as far as possible. Therefore, Martin's translation completely violates the basic principle of reproducing the "beauty of image" and is not a good translation, let alone respect the author and the original culture.

On the contrary, the translations of Mr. Xu Yuanchong, Soame Jenyns, and Inne Herdan all reproduce the beauty of images and emotions in the original poem. Xu Yuanchong sets up images through the transformation of sentence patterns. He translates "欲" and "将" into "can't," which reflects the unfulfilled desire. He translates "雪满山" into "the sky is blind with snow." From the poet's point of view, he expresses the visual confusion caused by the snow-covered mountains and foils the poet's emotional confusion and helplessness.

4.2.3. Beauty of Diction

Classical Chinese poetry, especially Tang poetry, extremely emphasizes the choice of words. Therefore, when translating a poem, translators should pay special attention to the refinement of words to realize the reproduction of the refined beauty. If a translation does not pay attention to the refinement of words and lines, the poetic flavor will fade, or even completely changed. Without the reproduction of the refined beauty of words, it cannot be known as a good translation or a qualified translation.

Each of the seven versions has its subtleties in terms of choice of words. Take "长风破浪" (literally, long wind breaking the waves) as an example. "长风破浪" originated from *Zongyi Biography*. When Zongyi's uncle asked him what his ambition was, Zongyi said, "I would like to ride the long wind breaking thousands of miles and waves." So this "long" should be translated. The poet uses the metaphor of "riding the wind and breaking the waves" to express his political ambition. When translating, translators should not only accurately translate the words "ride the wind and break the waves," but also reflect the poet's positive and optimistic attitude. Xu Yuanchong, Wu Juntao, Inne Herdan, and Soame Jenyns all translate the phrase with the word "ride," and we think "ride" here is wonderful because it has the connotative meaning of "control". It is cleverly used here to imply that the author is confident that he can change the status quo through his strength and ultimately realize his political ambition and life value. Xu Zhongjie's translation of "长风" into "favored by a breeze" has deviated from the author's original intention. Arthur Cooper's translation, "a breeze breaks," is even more wrong. W.A.P. Martin's translation of "a favoring breeze" is also a mistranslation to a certain degree.

4.2.4. Beauty of Allusion

Chinese poetry allusions contain rich traditional cultural characteristics. Apart from the faithful transmission of the source language information in translation, it is an essential means to reproduce the "beauty of allusion," which is an important means to inherit and carry forward cultural traditions and help Chinese culture going out. There are

many ways to translate allusions. Translators should choose different ways flexibly after thoroughly learning the original allusions.

The poem contains two allusions, “垂钓碧溪” and “乘舟梦日.” The former refers to the allusion of Lv Shang (Jiang Ziya) who lived in seclusion in the late Yin dynasty. In his later years, Jiang Ziya met King Wen of Zhou when he was fishing by the river. Then he was trusted and reused by the King and realized his ambition. The latter allusion refers to a man of Shang dynasty named Yiyin, who was born poor but gained the attention of King Tang and made some achievements eventually. These two allusions are relatively simple and can be translated literally or with additional notes. In Mr. Xu Yuanchong’s translation, the first one was translated literally:

"I can but poise a fishing pole beside a stream
Or set sail for the sun like a sage in a dream. "

The verb "poise" in the translated version means to maintain stability and the noun “a fishing pole” means confidence and calmness. With a stable fishing pole, the translated poem portrays a confident and calm image waiting for opportunities. In the second line, Mr. Xu added an image of "sage," which skillfully aroused people's association on allusions and hinted at his political aspirations. Although the two translated lines do not directly mention allusions, they arouse readers' association and ingeniously display the beauty of allusion with unique Chinese cultural characteristics. In addition, Wu Juntao's translation:

"Affecting peace of mind, I fish by the brook, -- only
To dream I'm sailing far and high by the sun thrilled! "

It also realizes a high degree of aesthetic reproduction of allusions. "Thrilled" in the second line implies the author's expectations for the future. The five translations of Xu Zhongjie, Arthur Cooper, W.A.P. Martin, Soame Jenyns and Inne Herdan also use literal translation to reproduce the original information, but they are not so impressive.

4.2.5. Beauty of Suggestiveness

Ancient Chinese literary theorists have always advocated the beauty of suggestiveness, which has become one of the most prominent aesthetic characteristics of Chinese poetry. The primary forms of suggestiveness are: turning the real into the unreal; saying this but referring to that; using the past to allude to the present. Therefore, the beauty of suggestiveness and the beauty of image, emotion, allusion, and diction above are overlapping in many cases. In the process of translating Tang poems into English, the beauty of suggestiveness of the original poems can be reproduced by notes and footnotes.

The two lines, "闲来垂钓碧溪上, 忽复乘舟梦日边," in “Hard Is the Journey (I)” implicitly and euphemistically express the poet's ambition and hope to be in office again by means of analogy between the past and the present. The translations of Xu Yuanchong and Wu Juntao, which have been discussed above, cleverly reproduce the beauty of allusion of the original poem and accurately convey the beauty of suggestiveness of Li Bai's aspirations. Although the other five versions are slightly inferior in reproducing the beauty of diction and emotion, their literal translations also show the beauty of suggestiveness of the couplet and Li Bai's technique of expressing his aspiration through actions.

4.2.6. Beauty of Gestalt

The beauty of gestalt is a comprehensive representation of different types of beauty in different types of poems, such as narrative poems, lyric poems, landscape poems and so on. “Hard Is the Journey (I)” is a typical narrative poem, which has strict rhythm and poetic pattern. The optimal reproduction of the beauty of form, music, emotion, etc. can better reflect the beauty of gestalt.

The versions of Xu Zhongjie, Soame Jenyns, and Inne Herdan have achieved a high degree of beauty of form, music, and emotion, which help to show the beauty of gestalt better. Xu Yuanchong's and Wu Juntao's translations reproduce the seven specific beauties mentioned above, in addition to the beauty of figures and perspectives.

4.3 Practice of "Eight Beauties Criteria"

Taking Dr. Wang Feng's "Eight Beauties Criteria" in Harmony-Guided Three Level Translation Criteria as the guiding translation aesthetics principle, the authors would like to present their translation, inviting criticism from experts and scholars.

Hard Is the Journey
Trans. by Ying Ting & Wang Feng
The pure wine held in golden cups costs thousands of gold,
The fancy food served in jade dishes values myriad coppers.
I put down my cup and chopsticks with my mind depressed,
I pulled out my sword and looked around with a heart distressed.
The ice-clad Yellow River prevented me from crossing over,
The snow-covered Taihang Mount kept me from climbing on.
In peace, I poised a fishing pole accompanied in a blue stream.
In surprise, I rowed a boat forward to the sun in my dream.
Hard is the journey! Hard is the journey!
There are so many branch roads, but which one is bound for me?
Expecting the time when I rode the wind and broke the waves,

I would raise my sail to clouds to cross the broad sea, being brave.

5. Conclusion

Through Dr. Wang Feng's Harmony-Guided Three Level Translation Criteria, this paper makes an analysis on the aesthetic features of the seven translations of Li Bai's "Hard Is the Journey (I)" from a comprehensive and novel perspective, which draws a conclusion that a good translation should try to meet the "Eight Beauty Criteria", which is innovative and forward-looking. It has a high practical value for the translation practice of classical Chinese poetry and helps to better carry forward the aesthetic ideas and charm contained in classical Chinese poetry and help Chinese culture going out.

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